NEW

SNES

The Complete Manual

The independent handbook for Nintendo fans

From the makers of retro GAMER

Welcome to SNES

The Complete Manual

The Super Nintendo Entertainment System holds a special place in the hearts of gamers around the world. Nintendo's follow-up to the phenomenally successful NES raised the bar for home videogame consoles, defining the 16-bit era with its innovative technology and unforgettable library of classic games, from *Super Mario World* to *The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past*. In SNES The Complete Manual, we celebrate everything about this iconic system, from its brilliant software and memorable peripherals to the designers and developers that helped bring it to life. Read on and let the nostalgia trip commence.

SNES
The Complete Manual

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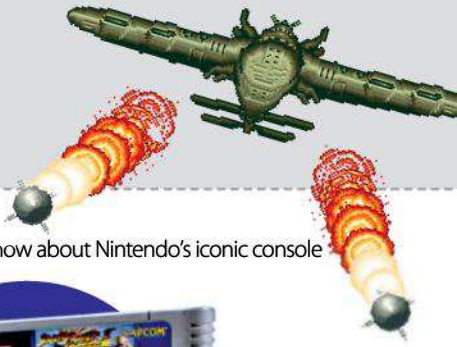

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RETROINSPECTION

SNES

The follow-up to the NES faced some serious competition, but an unbeatable game library helped it triumph

With a NES in 30 per cent of American homes and the word 'Famicom' synonymous with videogames in Japan, Nintendo was understandably reluctant to release a successor to its best selling console and chose to support the ageing 8-bit console for as long as it could. It was, however, only a matter of time before the advance of technology allowed Nintendo's competition to take the lead and by 1988 both NEC's PC Engine and Sega's Mega Drive offered a far more powerful entertainment experience. Nintendo could no longer rest on its laurels and secretly began work on the Super Famicom.

The 16-bit-system had been developed and designed by Masayuki Uemura, who had spent months attempting to make the Super Famicom backwards compatible with Famicom cartridges but had found that the massive leap in technology had set Nintendo's machine so far in advance of its predecessor that building in Famicom compatibility would have been far too costly. Without backwards compatibility to bridge the transition between consoles, Nintendo would need an irresistible launch line-up to tempt existing Famicom owners to upgrade. Knowing this, Nintendo's president, Hiroshi Yamauchi needed his best man on the job and, as soon as development of *Super Mario Bros 3* was complete, he charged Shigeru Miyamoto and his thirty-man team with the task of exploring the new hardware's game-playing capabilities.

One of the biggest tricks that the hardware had up its sleeve was the now infamous Mode 7: a graphical hardware mode that allowed sprites to zoom in and out and rotate in a way that simulated a 3D depth-of-field effect. Neither the Mega Dive nor PC Engine was capable of sprite scaling on such a level so Nintendo decided that the first three Super Famicom games would take advantage of the innovative feature. After 15 solid months of R&D, Miyamoto and

Info

Year Released	Japan: 1990 USA: 1991 UK: 1992
Original Price	Japan: 25,000 Yen USA: $199 UK: £149.99 (including *Super Mario World*)
Buy it now for	£25+ ($40+)
Associated Magazines	Nintendo Magazine System, Superplay, Total, N-Force, SNES Force

Why the SNES was great…

Nintendo's 16-bit powerhouse represents the true "Golden Age" of videogaming as the likes of Konami, Squaresoft and even Nintendo itself have arguably never been on better form than when designing games for this machine. The best SNES releases featured both flawless gameplay and graphics and set a high benchmark for quality entertainment software that, in many cases, endures to this day.

Super Castlevania was another great release from Konami and one of the last games to be released for the Super Famicom in 1999

Donkey Kong Country used Rare's "Advanced Computer Modelling" to create previously inconceivable pre-rendered visuals on the ageing SNES

By arriving so late in the console's life, *Yoshi's Island* went tragically unnoticed

An enigmatic 2-page advert for SNES RPG *Secret Of Mana*, which bravely chose not to use screenshots

Co would begin work on *F-Zero*, *Pilotwings* and *Super Mario Bros 4*, which would all use Mode 7 to varying degrees. However, with only ten months until launch day, the team was only able to complete two of the games on time and *Pilotwings* (the most technically demanding of the three) slipped by a month.

By 20 November 1990, Japanese demand for Nintendo's new console had reached fever-pitch and any worries that the machine would fail to entice existing Famicom owners were washed away. Demand for the console was so high that, for example, the Hankyu department store in Osaka had to stop taking preorders only a week after they started. In retrospect the release of the Super Famicom heralded the age of hysteria that has defined every hardware launch to this day. By 20 November, total pre-orders numbered in excess of 1.5 million yet only 300,000 machines shipped. Fearing that several Yakuza groups planned to hijack the Super Famicom shipment, to sell on at artificially inflated prices, Nintendo commenced 'Operation Midnight Shipping' in which the entire batch of 300,000 machines were hauled across Japan in the very early hours of the 20th. Thanks to these dramatic efforts, the launch was a rousing success: the Super Famicom sold out in seconds, even with only two launch titles. Yet when one of those titles was the sequel to the best selling game of all time, success was a certainty. Despite being the least technically demanding of the Super Famicom's launch titles it was *Super Mario Bros 4: Super Mario World* that shifted the machine. *Super Mario World* expanded on its predecessors by offering finely tuned platforming gameplay, beautiful pastel graphics and a staggering 79 levels. The game is still remembered, 16 years on, as the best 2D platform game of all time so it is no surprise that Nintendo relied on it to push sales of their console.

When it came time to introduce the renamed Super Nintendo Entertainment System to the UK (a typical 17 months after the Japanese release) Nintendo made the bold decision to bundle *Super*

Mario World with every SNES console. Making for one of the best freebies of all time, Mario helped to move many a SNES into British living rooms that summer, but arriving two years after the Mega Drive proved very costly. Sega's black beauty was phenomenally popular in Europe (thanks to its exclusive sports simulations and arcade conversions) and left little room for competition. It wasn't until Christmas of 1992 that the tide truly began to turn, thanks to Capcom's *Street Fighter II*. The original arcade game had spawned a worldwide craze, the likes of which had not been seen since the days of *Pac-Man* and *Space Invaders*, and whichever home console netted a conversion first would benefit from a serious rise in sales. Sure enough, Nintendo managed to snag Capcom's seminal brawler a full year before Sega and stole a significant slice of the UK market in the process. A pattern was starting to form: although Sega's success was assured by its in-house conversions and its relationship with EA, it was Nintendo's SNES that turned the most heads by continually providing the classiest most desirable games. It started with Mario and Street Fighter and continued through *Zelda*, *Secret Of Mana*, *Axelay*, *Super Mario Kart* and hundreds of other top-drawer games that would go on to steal the hearts of hardcore and casual gamers alike.

As the years went by and more powerful competitors (like the 3DO and Jaguar) fell by the wayside the SNES' excellent range

Keep sharp and avoid shake

To exploit the advantages of the growing CD-ROM medium, Nintendo had planned a SNES CD-ROM drive from as early as 1988 and had courted both Sony and Phillips with the proposal. The fruits of those early endeavours were a series of Nintendo licensed games for the Phillips CDI and a prototype add-on from Sony that was eventually developed into the PlayStation. If Nintendo had not backed out of the SNES/PlayStation partnership then the videogame landscape would be unrecognisable and this feature might tell a very different tale. It is unclear how many games were in development for the SNES-CD but we do know that *Secret Of Mana* was originally CD-based, with a branching story. The game had to be dramatically cut back to fit on cartridge.

Secret Of Mana started off as a CD title, complete with branching storylines

A room with a Satellaview

The Satellaview has such an unusual history that we could fill a feature on this add-on alone. The device allowed the Super Famicom to acquire games from St Giga: a popular Japanese satellite service. At prescheduled times the service would broadcast a chosen game, which could then be downloaded onto a flash cart and played "offline". The service was discontinued in 2000 but it is still possible to find flash carts with games saved to them. These extreme rarities should be of particular interest to Nintendo fans as the service featured exclusive versions of classic Nintendo games including *Zelda*, *Famicom Wars*, *Fire Emblem* and *Excitebike*. There was even a text based sequel to *Chrono Trigger* and some games, like the version of *A Link To The Past*, could only be played at certain times because the Satellaview broadcasted live voice-acting into them.

of software continued to impress with the aid of Nintendo's quality control and, when it became apparent that the console was beginning to show its age, Nintendo built partnerships with third-party developers to find new ways of making their games look next generation even if the original hardware wasn't. The first of these partnerships came about when the UK's Argonaut Software impressed Nintendo by programming the monochrome Game Boy to display full 3D graphics. On the strength of the Game Boy title, two of Argonaut's employees, Giles Goddard and Dylan Cuthbert, achieved what few British coders have and secured positions at Nintendo's Kyoto headquarters. There they developed the "Mario Chip" (later renamed Super FX) a cartridge embedded co-processor that would allow the SNES to display true 3D polygonal visuals for the first time. The first Super FX game they created, with the legendary design talents of Shigeru Miyamoto, was *Star Fox*: an astounding 3D space combat game that wowed SNES owners of 1993, who couldn't believe the console was capable of such graphics. The following year another incredibly talented UK software house found a way to push the SNES beyond its preconceived limits. Rare, who had previously pushed the ZX Spectrum much further than anyone thought possible, had been

By tying the release of Super Mario World to the SNES, Nintendo ensured the console's success

using Silicon Graphics workstations to test concepts for Nintendo's next console: the Ultra 64. In doing so they discovered a way of using high quality pre-rendered graphics on the humble SNES, which they used to create the beautiful *Donkey Kong Country* and an arcade conversion of the previously Ultra 64 bound *Killer Instinct*. With the PlayStation and the Saturn on the horizon the startling looks of Rare and Argonaut's games must have made the SNES a very tempting reason to not upgrade.

Nintendo's luck couldn't last forever though and, despite pushing the hardware to its limits, sales of the SNES slowed to a trickle in the UK – due in no small part to the globe-consuming success

of the PlayStation. Nevertheless, like all good consoles, the SNES was due for a last hurrah and it got one in the form of *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island*. The gorgeous platform game used a combination of Mode 7 and the Super FX2 chip to pump out some of the best effects the SNES had ever seen and with the classic Nintendo gameplay it became one of the console's most beloved titles. The gloriously beautiful platform game proved that the Super Nintendo was far from dead, but was sadly lost in the excitement of the new era of 3D games and the hype surrounding *Super Mario 64*. Though it attained outstanding critical acclaim, *Yoshi's Island* was a commercial flop in the UK and was one of the last significant SNES titles to see a European release alongside *Donkey Kong Country 3* and ***Street Fighter Alpha 2*** in December 1996.

As is typical of Japanese consoles, the native Super Famicom lived on much longer than the Western SNES thanks to continued hardware support and a greater demand for software. The Satellaview (see boxout) broadcasted new Super Famicom games directly into players' homes from 1995 to 2000 and, in doing so, kept the large user base active. A new hardware model was introduced in 1998: the Super Famicom Jr was a smaller, sleeker unit that was affordably priced as an alternative to the N64 and allegedly small enough to be sold in street vending machines. Top quality games continued to be released until 2000 with *Fire Emblem: Thracia 776* and a series of *Picross* titles being the most noteworthy.

Production of the Super Famicom finally ceased in late 2003, which may seem like a good innings until you consider that production of the original Famicom was discontinued in the same year. Regardless, throughout its thirteen-year lifespan, the SNES/Super Famicom achieved widespread success and adoration thanks to Nintendo's willingness to keep the machine alive through groundbreaking hardware expansions and a virtually limitless string of superb releases.

The SNES Jr did make it to the USA but its rarity makes it much easier to find the Japanese version

Star Fox (renamed *Star Wing* in the UK) used extra hardware to push the SNES beyond its limitations

SNES controller

Nintendo started the trend towards joypads with the release of the Famicom, and the design for its follow-up proved similarly influential. When the Super Famicom launched In Japan in 1990, it would introduce a variety of now-standard features to the console joypad. The first of these was the addition of shoulder buttons – two long buttons mounted on the top edge of the pad, rather than its face. The L and R buttons were designed for your index fingers to rest on while holding the pad, enabling quick access. The other change was the face button layout – four buttons in a diamond formation, with X and Y joining A and B. The pad also followed in the footsteps of Sega's Mega Drive controller by featuring a rounded body, showing a concession to ergonomics that hadn't been present in the Famicom and NES pads.

Shoulder buttons quickly caught on, becoming a standard feature of console joypads by the 32-bit generation, but the diamond formation of four face buttons took a little longer to become standard as companies (including Nintendo) experimented with different six-button layouts. However, all major consoles and dedicated gaming handhelds use it now – and all owe a debt to the SNES pad.

Details

Platform	SNES
Released	1990
Cost	£7 (unboxed) £10 (boxed)

SNES controller fact

Rather than creating its own controller connection standard for the CPS Changer arcade system, Capcom opted to include SNES control ports. Of course, the company hoped you'd use its controllers rather than standard SNES pads…

Editor's Choice: F-Zero

This futuristic racing game made a perfect case for the SNES pad's layout right from the launch of the system, by offering a control scheme that would be impossible on any other control pad available at the time. As well as the standard acceleration, brake and steering controls expected of a racing game, *F-Zero* added a turbo function on the A button. However, the best addition was the ability to lean your craft with the shoulder buttons, intuitively using L and R buttons to add extra cornering power or provide lateral movement in the appropriate direction.

Perfect 10 games

There is a fantastic, diverse range of great games available on the Super Nintendo, which makes putting any selection of games together a near thankless task. We'll happily do it though, as we love Nintendo's 16-bit console. So without further ado, here's our essential choices that deserve to be in every Super Nintendo owner's collection. If you don't own them, you clearly don't love Nintendo's console as much as we do

01 Super Mario Kart

- **Released** 1993 • **Published by** Nintendo
- **Created by** Nintendo

We've been playing the original *Super Mario Kart* on and off now for a staggering 20 years and it still remains fresher than a baker's dozen that's just popped out the oven. Meticulously designed circuits, a well-balanced range of weapons – including the greatly missed feather – and impressive visuals proved perfectly that there was so much more to everyone's favourite plumber than simply jumping on wayward Koopas. While the cups provided plenty of fun, it was the stunning time trial mode and sublime multiplayer games that kept us constantly going back for just one more go. Thank goodness we weren't around at the time of *Mario Kart*'s release; we'd have never got the damned magazine finished on time!

02 Super Metroid

• **Released** 1994 • **Published by** Nintendo
• **Created by** Intelligent Systems

Super Metroid is a game that works on a variety of levels. While some marvelled at its motherly themes, stunningly created environments and remarkable attention to detail, others were simply impressed with the sheer amount of crap you could blow up in it. Regardless of how you feel about Samus's only 16-bit adventure, there's no denying that *Super Metroid* remains a staggering achievement that perfectly combines the rush of shooting huge bosses with the wonder of exploring vast new areas like no other SNES game. Little wonder that it took Nintendo eight years to come up with a sequel that could do it justice.

03 The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past

• **Released** 1992 • **Published by** Nintendo
• **Created by** Intelligent Systems

There's no denying the superiority of *Ocarina Of Time*, but *A Link To The Past* remains a wonderfully accomplished adventure that deserves to sit proudly in every SNES owner's collection. Every dungeon you explore is crafted to perfection, and while they start off easy, you'll soon be scratching your head over Miyamoto's deviously designed puzzles. The many weapons you discover are well balanced and every boss is a masterstroke in design. Then of course you have the two unique worlds that Link can eventually switch between, making an already sprawling game even larger.

04 Contra III: The Alien Wars

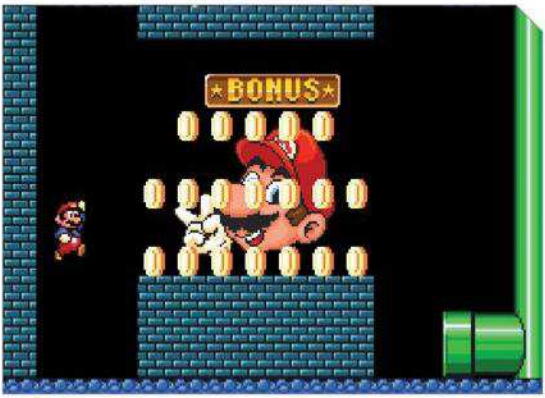
• **Released** 1992 • **Published by** Konami • **Created by** Konami

Konami released some outstanding titles for Nintendo's 16-bit wonder, but this cracking effort from 1992 is arguably one of its best efforts. Each level is a rollercoaster ride of destruction and featured the SNES hardware on fine form. Sprites are full of detail, the game's many bosses a joy to behold, and there's a ridiculous amount of Mode 7 trickery going on. Add in a fantastic, stomping soundtrack, an awesome array of different weapons and some groovy overhead levels (that can be rotated with the left and right triggers) and you have a run-and-gun title that would be essential on any format.

05 Axelay

• **Released** 1993 • **Published by** Konami • **Created by** Konami

There's a host of great shooters available for the SNES, but few can compare to the brilliance that is Konami's stunning *Axelay*. From its quasi-3D levels to its utterly amazing music, every moment of *Axelay* is exhilarating to play through. While the level design and available weapons are worthy of praise, it's the immense, striking bosses the game constantly throws at you that truly astound. Huge metallic spiders, colossal ED-209 styled mechs and a gigantic lava creature are just a few of the mayors you have to deal with and each is breath-taking to behold. Why's it's never been released on the GBA we'll never know…



06 Super Mario All-Stars

• **Released** 1993 • **Published by** Nintendo • **Created by** Nintendo

What's better than three classic Mario NES outings on one cartridge? Why, three Mario NES games with improved aesthetics and a fourth exclusive title that had only originally appeared in Japan of course! *All-Stars'* triple whammy of *Super Mario Bros 1*, *2* and *3* made it incredible value for money and were great examples of taking old games and updating them for a newer platform. Add in *Super Mario Bros: The Lost Levels*, a tougher version of the original game that allowed you to choose from either brother and you had an amazingly comprehensive package. Later versions even included *Super Mario World* on the cartridge!

07 Chrono Trigger

• **Released** 1995 • **Published by** Squaresoft • **Created by** Squaresoft

It would have been all too easy to go with Squaresoft's *Secret Of Mana*, so we've decided to focus on this little beauty instead. While Squaresoft's epic borrows plenty of ideas from the *Final Fantasy* series, you just can't help but be impressed by the amount of love that has gone into crafting this astonishing RPG. Although the central storyline is fairly predictable, it soon begins to twist and turn, introducing plenty of memorable characters and sub-plots. The combat system is a joy to use and the use of sound throughout is outstanding. It all combines to create one of the most engrossing RPGs we've ever played.

08 Street Fighter Alpha II

• **Released** 1996 • **Published by** Capcom • **Created by** Capcom

Capcom's second *Alpha* title was released late in the SNES' life, and as a result, was sadly overlooked by a great many gamers who had moved on to the newer, flashier consoles. Their loss was our gain however, as it's easily one the best brawlers on Nintendo's 16-bit wonder. Great looking sprites, a solid roster of characters, new moves, plenty of additional animation and thumping good gameplay made *Alpha II* a winner. We've no idea why the first game didn't appear on the SNES, but Capcom more than made up for it with this excellent sequel. An outstanding fighter that deserves to be in everyone's SNES collection.

09 Pilotwings

• **Released** 1993 • **Published by** Nintendo • **Created by** Nintendo

The Mode 7 chip was used in countless numbers of SNES games, but never was its appearance more noticeable than in the wondrous *Pilotwings* Taking control of a budding pilot, all the game required you to do was master licences for four different events: Skydiving, Rocketbelt, Light Plane and Hang Glider. While some of *Pilotwings*' events could be tricky to get to grips with, the elation you felt when they were finally mastered more than made up for it. Thanks to the excellent Mode 7 effects the sense of scale you encountered as you flew through the air was breathtaking, and just wait until you finally get to use the hang glider…

10 Umihara Kawase

• **Released** 1994 • **Published by** NHK • **Created by** TNN

It seems only fair to put at least one quirky Japanese title in the top ten, so our vote here goes to the delightful *Umihara Kawase*. Taking control of an adorably cute little girl, the aim of each stage is simple – avoid the host of bizarre fishy enemies out to get you and reach the door on each exit. Of course, said exit is often out of reach, and with your little tyke not being that great a jumper she has to rely on a handy elastic rope to get her around. Think a cutesy *Bionic Commando* but with some decent rope physics thrown into the mix and you have a pretty good idea of what to expect here.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past

When Link is first cast into the Dark World, it's all a bit surreal. Transformed into a pink bunny, and left with just a blob and a friendly fiend for company, it seems like a quick one-off set piece and nothing more. But then, when Agahnim drags Link into the Dark World for a second time, it clicks. This isn't a set piece. This is an entirely different world. Although based on the same map, the two worlds are wildly different in terms of layout and population – new dungeons appeared in previously explored locations while super-tough enemies ran amok. Success would rely upon clever use of portals and the Magic Mirror to quickly leap between the two planes of existence and, although this mechanic has been commonplace in games ever since, it can all be traced back to Link's original mind-blowing, dimension-hopping antics.

Bio

Oh, it's just one of the greatest games of all time, that's all. Returning to the format of the original game rather than its divisive sequel, Nintendo created an open world that was endlessly enjoyable to explore and one that rewarded curiosity and persistence wonderfully. Even today, after so many sequels, *A Link To The Past* holds up as perhaps the definitive *Zelda* experience – modern interpretations have tended to be more formulaic and gimmick-heavy, so this freeform adventure (where success doesn't always hinge on the last tool you found) is rightly regarded as a timeless classic.

Platform	SNES
Developer	Nintendo
Released	1992

More Classic A Link To The Past Moments

Gotta catch 'em all!

Fairies are useful enough when you can just grab them for a quick energy refill, but that moment when you realise that you can carry the buggers around with you is one that you'll never forget. To be fair, the guy who gives you the bug net isn't exactly subtle about its uses but, even so, swiping a fairy out of the air and storing it in a jar for later was an incredible sensation. And the surprise of being revived by one was even better feature a screen-clearing smart bomb, but we're pretty sure it's one of the most spectacular to gawp at.

A kind of magic

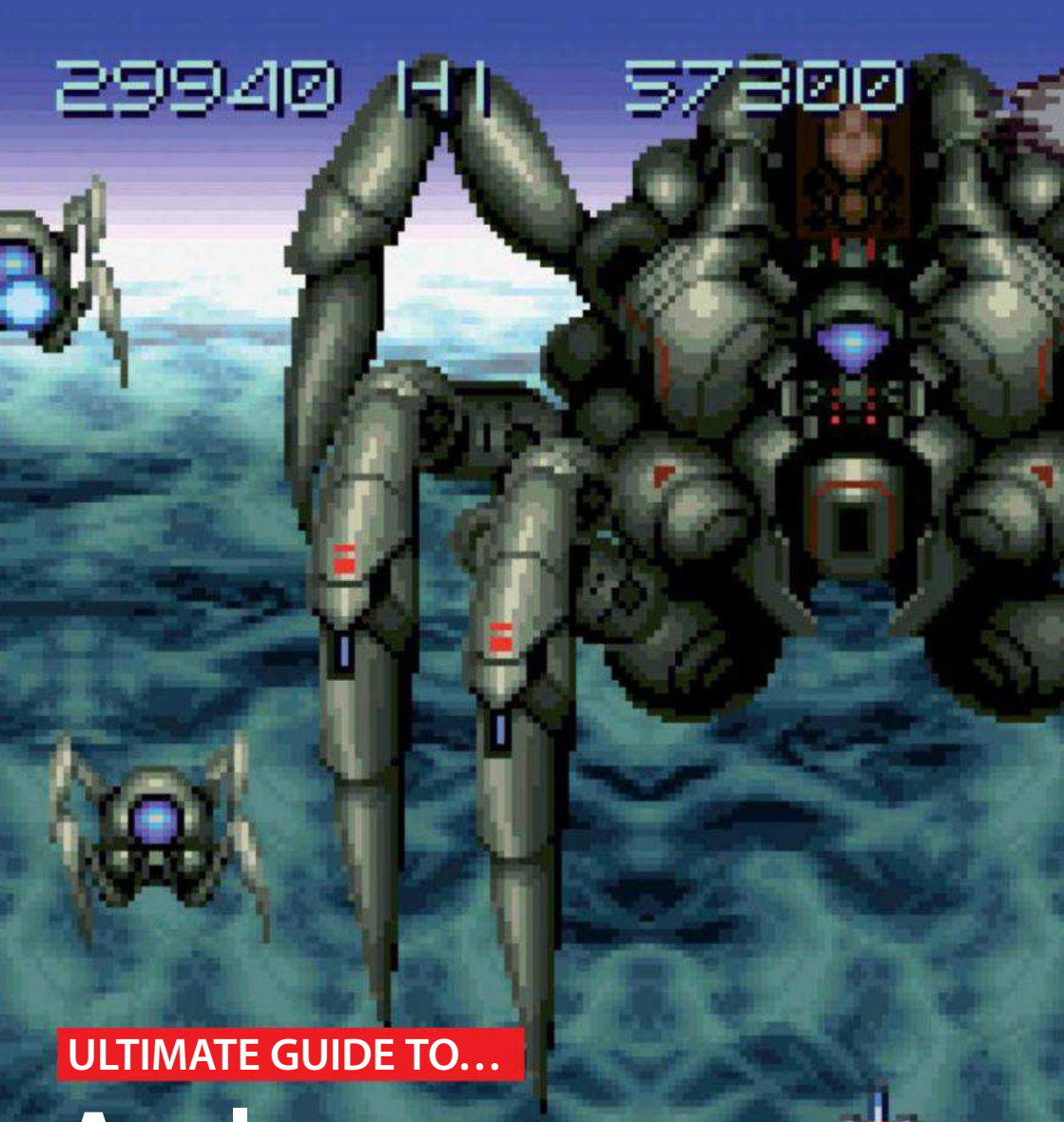
Early in the game, it doesn't seem like Link's magic gauge is going to be all that important. Sure, it lets you set fire to stuff and light up dark areas, but that's hardly what anyone other than cavemen would call 'magic'. Explore the further reaches of Hyrule however, and you'll find numerous ways to put that meter to far more impressive use, from the handy Ice Rod to the secret medallions that grant Link unique abilities.

A link to the fast

Top-down games of the time had a tendency to be slower and more considered than side-scrolling efforts. While Link isn't exactly slow with his basic gear, the introduction of the Pegasus Boots turns him into a little green lightning bolt, meaning you could race through earlier areas and decimate any enemies in your path. But, we'll never forget how long it took us to realise that charging into objects could shake items free. That bloody book…

Obey your master

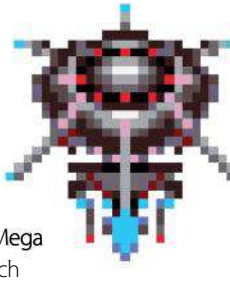
It's all 'Master Sword this, Master Sword that' in *Zelda* games, but the speed at which you can get your hands on it here is amazing. Three simple dungeons, three easy bosses (well, two easy bosses and that annoying worm thing) and three medallions are all that stand between you and this mighty weapon, which gives Link a ranged attack while at full health and allows him to take on Agahnim to first reach the Dark World.



ULTIMATE GUIDE TO…

Axelay

We hop onto our custom-made cardboard star fighter and charts a course for the Illis System in order to bring you as much information on Konami's seminal SNES shooter as possible. You better have an itchy trigger finger…



Konami's *Axelay* is a landmark shooter in many ways, but the most striking is the fact that it manages to bring intense alien-blasting action to a format that supposedly struggles with the genre. Much has been made over the years of Nintendo's decision to grant the SNES a CPU operating at a mere 3.58MHz – its rival, the Sega Mega Drive, contained a Motorola 68000 processor, which tore along at a comparatively blistering 7.67MHz – and many critics still maintain that this is the reason for the puzzling lack of decent shmups on the system: the sluggish central processor simply cannot cope with multiple enemies and projectiles on the screen all at the same time, they suggest. There's probably a grain of truth in this assumption, but the theory does come somewhat unstuck when you take a look at *Axelay* in glorious motion.

Released back when SNES titles were still leveraging their graphical superiority over Mega Drive software, *Axelay*'s primary draw was its incredible visuals. Few who were around at the time to witness it in motion can forget the powerful spectacle of the unique rolling perspective, which used the SNES's custom graphics chips to create the impression of flying towards a distant horizon. In truth, it wasn't totally convincing, but it was certainly striking and remains so even today.

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery

Like *Thunder Force II* and Konami stablemate *Salamander*, *Axelay* alternates between horizontal and side-scrolling levels. This essentially gives shooter addicts the best of both worlds, and

Critical reception

What the gaming press thought…

"It's got the best graphics of any game, on any system. Ever. After seeing it, your friends will be so gobsmacked they'll rush out and buy SNESs of their own"

- Super Play 1992

Twin Galaxies high score

SNES (NTSC)
Name: Patrick J DiCesare
Points: 1,974,980

Instant expert

The Japanese and North American versions of *Axelay* were launched within a month of each other. European gamers had to wait an agonising 12 months to get their hands on the game

Although Taro Kudou was responsible for the game's excellent soundtrack, Masanori Adachi remixed Level 2's tune, with memorable results

***Axelay*'s official soundtrack was released on CD in Japan on 21 October 1992**

The ***Axelay*** fighter was featured in the 2004 PS2 release Airforce Delta Strike, which was retitled Deadly Skies III in Europe

***Axelay* features references to other Konami titles, the most obvious being the flame dragons on Level 5 – a cheeky nod to similar enemies in Gradius II**

A beta version of the game was made available, which allowed players to quickly select which level they wished to tackle as well as gain invincibility. This version was used to bug test portions of the game prior to release

***Axelay*'s main programmer Hideo Ueda has also worked on the Castlevania, Silent Hill and Metal Gear Solid franchises**

To get the 'true' ending you need to complete the game on the hard difficulty setting. Completing it on normal results in the mocking message 'Challenge Hard Mode'

both variations offer the same degree of amazing and addictive gameplay. Another constant is the flawless standard of presentation; Mode 7 trickery aside, *Axelay* is a jaw-droppingly gorgeous game and arguably one of the best-looking 16-bit shooters ever created. Not only is the screen awash with highly detailed enemy ships, but the incredible bosses are some of the most memorable ever committed to silicon.

Refreshingly, *Axelay* has top-notch gameplay to back up the appealing aesthetics. Unlike the vast majority of other genre classics, *Axelay* features no weapon or item pick-ups whatsoever. As you advance through the game you gain access to more armaments, which can be loaded onto your craft between missions, but essentially you're given all of the tools you need from the outset of the game. Every situation you encounter during the adventure can be dealt with by switching to one of your three available weapon pods – although naturally some are better at the job than others.

Another unique feature is the way in which your *Axelay* craft takes damage. Sustaining a direct hit from a projectile doesn't kill you but instead knocks out whatever weapon you have equipped at the time. This means you can take three hits before you lose a life. However, this is balanced by the fact that a direct collision with another craft or part of the environment results in your fighter instantly being ripped asunder in a shower of metal.

An excellent reception

When it was launched in 1992, *Axelay* gained incredible praise from all quarters, with the gaming press understandably bowled over by the unique faux-3D scrolling and high standard of presentation. Taro Kudou's perfectly suited soundtrack was also held in high regard and is outstanding, even by today's standards. Given the popularity of the game and its near-dominance of the SNES shooter library, a sequel was almost a given – in fact, the game's ending sequence practically promises a follow-up with the words: 'See you again at *Axelay 2*.' Sadly, despite the rumours and anticipation of fans, Konami never fulfilled that particular pledge. Main programmer Hideo Ueda – who also worked on *TwinBee*, *Quarth* and *Parodius* – remained with

Pixel perfect

Your guide to the characters of *Axelay*. How many have you seen?

• A-12 Interceptor

• Aquatic Attacker

• Armada Battleship

• Baby Robo Spider

• BombShip

• Colony Defense Droid

• Cyclops

• Depth Charger

• Crawler

• Cutter Blade

• Crawler Carrier

• Drone

• DropShip

• Evil Seahorse

• F19 Fighter Escort

• Fake Axelay

• Fire Floater

• Fire Walker

• Fire Worm

• Supreme Gunship

• S-67 Glider

• G70 Firesailer

• GT56 Attack Craft

• Guard Walker

• Gun Turret

• Jellyfish

• Laser Gunship

• Mine

• Mini Fighter

• Missile Launcher

• Mobile Armour

• R43 Firestorm

• P-90 Fighter

• Pod Turret

• SpiderWalker

• Flying Fish

• Skater

• SpaceBird

• Needler

• Spike Craft

• SpyDroid

• Storm Ship

• Sucker Pod

• Flame Dragon

• Tentacle Tracker

• Tube Spider

• Underwater Turret

• Water Grub

• X-77 Jumper

• X-155 StormBringer

Poor logistics on the part of the Illis System's defence forces, but the setup made for a great shooter

the company but Kazuhiko Ishida – who is credited as 'support programmer' on the title – went on to establish Treasure with Masato Maegawa in the same year that *Axelay* was released. It has been a common rumour over the years that other key staffers involved with the game also left Konami with Maegawa and Ishida at the same time, which possibly explains why a planned sequel never materialised.

Best of the best

Today *Axelay*'s standing in the shooter world is as high as ever, with the game regularly appearing in polls aiming to ascertain the greatest shmup of all time. It continues to command a fair price on the second-hand market, but thankfully for those of you that don't relish the thought of paying over the odds for a dusty old cartridge, *Axelay* has also been made available via Nintendo's Wii-based Virtual Console service, where its lofty reputation and timeless appeal has resulted in it being discovered and appreciated by a whole new legion of new fans.

Axelay's arsenal

Here's a rundown of the weapon systems available on your top-of-the-line D117B Axelay fighter

Straight Laser

A powerful burst of plasma energy, which is one of your first weapons

Needle Cracker

A swift-firing homing weapon, which seeks out enemy units

Wind Laser

The final laser upgrade has a particularly wide range of fire

Round Vulcan

360 degrees of high-velocity death: a vital weapon

Morning Star

Another weapon handy for taking out several enemies at once

Macro Missile

A powerful rocket launcher with a large blast radius

Explosion Bomb

Air-to-ground missiles useful for taking out gun turrets

Cluster Bomb

Quite similar to the Explosion Bomb, but fires backwards

Memorable moments

Sit back and enjoy Konami's coders let loose on 16-bit hardware

A matter of perspective

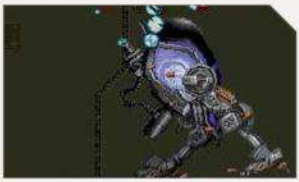
Granted, *Axelay*'s Mode 7 scrolling landscape isn't all that realistic and looks a little outdated, but in 1992 it was astonishing. 2D shooters had always been relatively flat affairs, and Konami's graphical trick was impressive.

Afraid of spiders

Arachnatron may not be the toughest boss you'll face, but he's one of the most unforgettable. Almost filling the screen, this beastie shows some stunning animation and was a class above the static guardians in most shooters of the era.

Going sideways

Mixing horizontal and vertical scrolling in shooters wasn't new in 1992 – in fact, Konami had done it before – but that doesn't detract from the shock of entering Level 2 and realising that you're scrolling in a different direction.



Twenty seconds to comply

In 1992 RoboCop was still a household name, and *Axelay*'s second boss is shamelessly based on the scary rogue security bot ED-209. The eerily robotic music further accentuated the rather oppressive nature of this boss battle.

Rings around the world

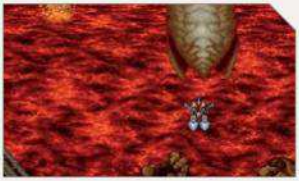
Level 2 starts off as a typical space station environment, but halfway through you realise that you're in a 'ring world' – a concept made famous in Japanese anime series Gundam and the more recent Halo titles.

Barrier to entry

Level 3 takes place above the neon lights of a brightly coloured city, but you'll be focused on navigating the vast network of barriers that block your path – taking out the weak segments causes them to plummet towards the ground.

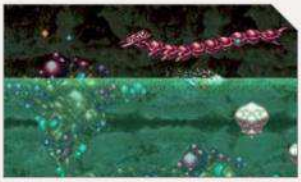
Don't go changing

The third boss that you face starts off looking anything but fearsome, but after taking a beating he morphs into a massive battle station thanks to the incredible graphical power of Nintendo's 16-bit hardware.



I got worms

Someone at Konami was clearly a Frank Herbert fan, because Level 5 features some massive worms that bear more than a passing resemblance to those witnessed in the author's legendary sci-fi epic Dune.

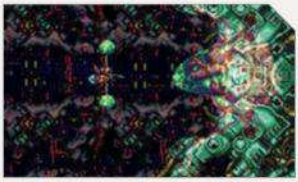


Skimming the surface

Every decent shooter needs an underwater segment, and *Axelay* has one in Level 4. Placing your ship above the surface of the water causes water to splash up; just one of many awesome graphical effects in the game.

You and whose army?

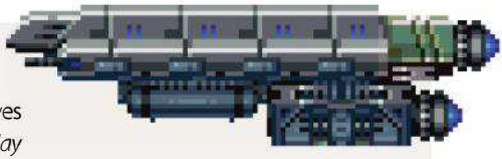
The final stage throws you in at the deep end, fighting against a bunch of ships so large that they don't even fit on the screen. In terms of pure spectacle it's one of the game's most impressive moments.



Copycat

The final boss is a sneaky fellow and even goes as far as to replicate your ship and use clones against you. Seeing his scanning field appear and methodically copy your craft is a terrifying – but nonetheless impressive – event.

Boss rush



Many shmup aficionados would argue that a blaster lives and dies by the quality of its boss encounters, and *Axelay* certainly doesn't disappoint in this department. As well as a truly fearsome number of mid-level bosses, the game boasts some of the most unforgettable level guardians to grace the 16-bit era. These epic enemies are notable not only for their variety and cunning tactics, but for allowing the SNES to showcase some of its most impressive visual tricks, with sprite rotation, Mode 7 scaling and smooth animation. Here's a rundown of the supreme beings waiting for you at the conclusions of *Axelay*'s levels.

Arachnatron

STAGE ONE - Cumuluses

Throughout the history of shooters there has been a custom of memorable opening bosses, and the mechanical spider that waits at the conclusion of *Axelay*'s first level certainly conforms to that tradition. Boasting spookily authentic animation thanks to its multi-jointed nature – each limb is a separate sprite – and a fearsome phalanx of baby spider robots supporting from the rear, it's no wonder that Arachnatron has remained indelibly inked in the memory of many a SNES gamer. Naturally, its status as the game's debut boss encounter results in a relatively low degree of difficulty: the tractor-beam web that Archanatron occasionally spits out slows your ship down, making it harder to dodge incoming projectiles, but on the whole you'll find this chap looks a lot more scary than he actually is. Focus all of your firepower on the mouth section initially because, once you destroy it, the web can no longer be fired. After this you should throw all of your available weaponry at the eye, which is the spider's weak spot.

T-36 Towbar

STAGE TWO - Tralieb Colony

Bearing an uncanny resemblance to bipedal RoboCop antagonist ED-209, the T-36 Towbar lurks in a battered and derelict portion at the end of the Tralieb Colony. Animated using a combination of sprites and rotating Mode 7 effects, this two-legged monster slowly stumbles backwards along the corridor, stopping every so often to attempt to blow your fragile craft out of the air. When Towbar pauses to attack, make sure you're high up near the ceiling of the level. He will either shoot with his machine gun, which can be blasted off if you feel like adjusting the odds in your favour, or engage his deadly laser beam attack. Both attacks can be angled, so you'll need to make sure you're in the top-right corner of the screen to avoid being vaporised. Towbar's weak spot is the exposed motor unit just behind his protective hood; the explosive nature of your missiles or bombs can penetrate his defensives for massive damage. This resourceful enemy is also capable of hurling smaller projectiles your way, so don't let your guard down.

Regenertoid

STAGE THREE - Urbanite

This boss starts off in a rather underwhelming fashion, teleporting onto the screen as a tiny ship before changing into the shape of a spinning top. What it lacks in visual impact it makes up for in raw aggression, though – you'll need to take out the various gun ports on the rim of Regenertoid to put a stop to the hail of bullets that it spews out. Doing this triggers the second stage of the attack: the rather pathetic cone-like shape is augmented by fearsome red battle armour, complete with devastating laser cannons that fill up large portions of the screen when fired – just make sure you're not anywhere near them at the time. Focus your attack on the centre of Regenertoid's shell and you'll send it packing in no time, but make sure you keep moving because this monster's massive size means that on-screen real estate is kept to a bare minimum.

Aquadon

STAGE FOUR - The Cavern

Looking every inch like a crustacean you'd run a mile from at the beach, Aquadon ramps up the difficulty level with his multiple attack capabilities. If you don't get taken out by the laser blasts and procession of minions that swarm around his shell, you'll still have to face the prospect of being zapped by his irksome lightning bolt attack. While this isn't deadly, it stuns your craft temporarily and causes your weapons to go haywire, which often means you'll end up with an attack that is woefully mismatched for the situation. Aquadon has two weak spots, both of which must be pushed backwards into his shell before the other opens up. You'll need to pay close attention to which is exposed at any one time, as you'll more often than not be looking elsewhere on the screen to avoid the many hostile objects flying in your general direction.

Wayler

STAGE FIVE - Lava Planet

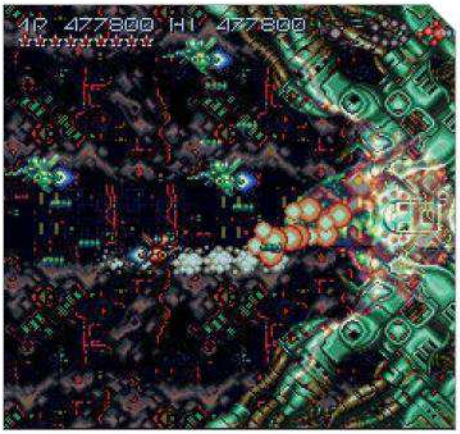
Transported from the soggy depths of the Cavern to the fiery wastes of the imaginatively named Lava Planet, your waterlogged space suit is likely to dry out quickly, but unfortunately you'll also have to face off against one of the game's most famous faces and the cover star of the Western version: Wayler. A massive cyborg capable of withstanding extreme temperatures and clad in molten lava, this brute is yet another example of the SNES's graphical muscle, showcasing smooth, multi-segmented animation and filling almost the entire screen. Like any other self-respecting fire robot, Wayler is fond of spewing flames from his mouth and flailing his enormous arms around like a child at a school disco, causing untold amounts of damage to any spaceship foolish enough to be in close proximity. Be sure to keep well away from those massive mitts of his and channel all of your energy into blasting away at his chest. Doing so reveals his weak spot – a green 'heart' – that, once destroyed, forces Wayler's lifeless body to sink beneath the red-hot planet surface, never to return.

"Like any other self-respecting fire robot, Wayler is fond of spewing flames from his mouth and flailing his enormous arms around like a child"

Veinion

STAGE SIX - The Armada of Annihilation's Fortress

After fighting your way through the alien fleet and infiltrating the enemy base, you're faced with the final challenge: Veinion, the evil leader of the Armada of Annihilation. At first glance he appears to be some kind of robotic overlord, but after blasting away for a while you'll uncover his true form: a horrific alien organism that has the capability of copying your attacks. Your ship is scanned and Veinion proceeds to hurl clone Axelay craft in your direction. Needless to say, this is the hardest boss battle in the game and seems to last for an age. Even when you've finally destroyed Veinion and made good your escape from the rapidly disintegrating alien fortress, the battle is far from over – the enemy leader tries to prevent your getaway by filling the screen with shrapnel and blocking your progress. Land a few well-aimed missiles in his gullet and he vanishes into the ether, leaving the path open for you to finally return home.



Street Fighter II Turbo

Return of the king

I don't exactly have a lot of love for Capcom's seminal brawler. Don't get me wrong. I'm fully aware of its historical importance and realise that plenty of people still play it on a regular basis but after witnessing the glorious choreography of *Street Fighter 3: Third Strike*, its older peer appeared to have nothing new to offer. How wrong I was…

Thanks to Capcom, and Xbox Live Arcade, I've been able to re-discover the joy of *Street Fighter II*, or more specifically, Street Fighter II Hyper Fighting (or Turbo as it's known to us Brits). While the original *Street Fighter II* remains a slow, turgid experience (sorry guys, but it's true) Turbo gives the game a much-needed boost of speed and ensures that bouts are always satisfying. New costumes, extra moves and re-designed backdrops were just a few of the additions Capcom included and I still have the cool metal tin it was packaged in.

While later titles have presented us with more character choices than ever, ridiculous specials and the beauty that is parrying, there's still something immensely satisfying about a no-nonsense round of *Turbo*. There's no need to worry about pulling off double fireball motions, you won't moan over the cheapness of *Third Strike*'s Chun-Li and Ken, you can just concentrate on mastering the good old fashioned art of beating the hell out of each other. Sure the character models look a little old-fashioned and the animation has lost a lot of its slickness over the years, but even with these niggles (and that's all they are really), *Turbo*'s gameplay remains resoundingly solid.

While it's no longer my 2D fighter of choice (that honour goes to the excellent digital port of *Street Fighter III: Third Strike*), *Street Fighter II Turbo* remains one of the slickest 16-bit arcade conversions around, and time has done nothing to diminish that fact.

Publisher	Capcom
Released	1993
Genre	Beat-'em-up
Featured Hardware	SNES

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63
RYU

THE MAKING OF

Super Metroid

The Metroid series went in exciting new directions with the release of this 16-bit classic. We visited Nintendo HQ to scale the summit of the Metroid series with director Yoshio Sakamoto

Heading back up to ground level as I leave the immaculate subway at Jujo Station in the south of Kyoto, I walk through this remarkably unremarkable suburb until I see the big white block that houses Nintendo's contemporary headquarters. The gates to NCL are manned by two portly, middle-aged guards who seem to project a faintly threatening presence, which is comically undone as I notice, behind them, in the back of their little booth, a stash of NCL-manufactured toy guns apparently left over from the Seventies and a selection of Nintendo character plushes from way back in the Famicom era. This may not be the original Nintendo HQ site, but it clearly retains the company's history like a hoarding retro gamer hangs on to loose carts.

Inside, beyond the pristine lawns and shiny entrance, I enter a marble-floored, austere world whose foyer is staffed by painfully polite and correctly spoken Nintendo officials. Eventually I'm led into a meeting room on the ground floor, where I sip the o-cha kindly provided by the demure NCL woman as I wait – and slightly nervously revise my notes and cue my Dictaphone – until a smiling, ponytailed artist type arrives and immediately makes his introduction. This is Yoshio Sakamoto, producer of *Super Metroid* back in the early Nineties and still an integral Nintendo developer today. "Hajimemashite. Yoroshiku onegai shimasu."

Sakamoto has brought with him a small booklet containing an overview of *Super Metroid* to aid his memory – the game was completed 15 years ago, but the *Metroid* legacy stretches back two decades – as we chat.

In the know

Publisher	Nintendo
Developer	R&D1/Intelligent Systems
Released	1994
Genre	Adventure

Super Metroid

Series highlights

Metroid (FDS/NES/GBA – 1986)
The *Metroid* series was born on disk, not cartridge. It began life as this 1986-vintage Famicom Disk System title before migrating to the silicon of NES carts for consumption in the West. Videogames' first internationally famous heroine was born here. (An emulated version can be found in the GameCube release of *Metroid Prime*.)

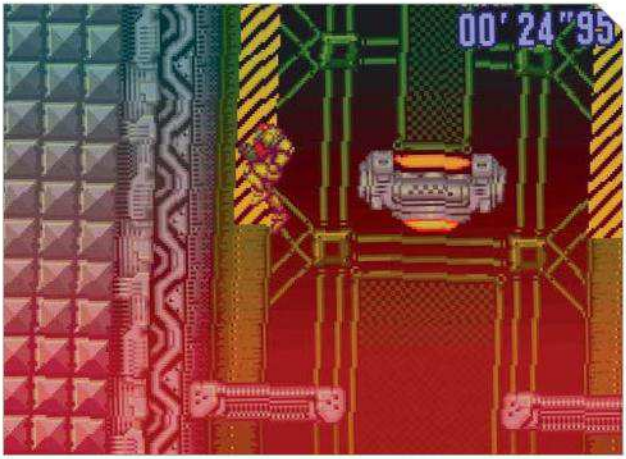
Metroid II: Return Of Samus (Game Boy – 1992)
This monochrome curio transported Samus to the Metroid homeworld of SR388, its dramatic finale providing Sakamoto and team with a bridge into the events of *Super Metroid*. It may not be as pretty as its relatives, but *Return Of Samus* remains an essential experience for the family's admirers.

"To start with, there was the Famicom *Metroid* game," he recalls. Sakamoto worked on that first *Metroid* adventure, and its relevance to *Super Metroid* is particularly important because of the unchanging core concept of the 2D *Metroid* games; a core that was formed in said Famicom Disk System original of 1986.

"My boss [producer Makoto Kanoh] told me that *Metroid* was really popular in North America, so he encouraged me to produce a new *Metroid* game with the high-quality graphics that were becoming possible thanks to the Super Famicom. Of course I said, 'Yes, I'd like to try doing that.' The game design and concept had already been established before *Metroid II* was produced for the Game Boy," Sakamoto explains. "When it came to making another sequel, this time for the Super Famicom, we really wanted to see how far we could push the SFC to generate greater power of expression and enhance the appearance of the game world, all while working with a basically unchanged concept. That was our initial motivation as far as *Super Metroid* was concerned: to build on the expressiveness of *Metroid II* and achieve greater presence, something closer to a reality."

Sakamoto had nothing to do with the development of *Metroid II*, yet that sophomore title in part shaped the plan for *Super Metroid*: "As the last scene depicted Baby Metroid being born right in front

Super Metroid brought with it *Metroid II*'s battery saves, a godsend after the first game's password system

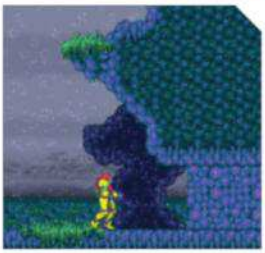


of Samus's eyes… well… there's no real explanation for that in the course of the games, but that scene was another source of incentive for us in that we wanted to follow on from that ending, linking *Metroid II* with *Super Metroid*. We were determined to keep the same world-view and maintain the continuity of the story."

Aside from the basic gameplay formula set in motion by *Metroid*, the code on that million-selling disk also plotted the aesthetic direction of the series. I suggest to Sakamoto-san that *Super Metroid* and the *Metroid* games in general don't look like 'typical' NCL games and I ask him why that might be. He sips his tea and then replies: "I think the film *Alien* had a huge influence on the production of the first *Metroid* game. All of the team members were affected by HR Giger's design work, and I think they were aware that such designs would be a good match for the *Metroid* world we had already put in place. To be honest, I've never really been clear on what is or isn't the 'Nintendo look', but as far as we were concerned, we were just projecting another image from within Nintendo – another face of Nintendo, if you like. But yes, it's a science-fiction game, so…"

Other than the artistic influence of Necronom, Sakamoto reckons that numerous games affected the style of *Super Metroid* – "I can't list them… There are just too many of them" – although he counters this by highlighting the experimental side of his team's early work: "For the prototype stage of *Super Metroid*'s development we just had a few Intelligent Systems programming staff, myself, and another [in-house] Nintendo designer. We examined what was

Series highlights



Super Metroid (SNES – 1994)
Arguably the finest game in the *Metroid* series, this 16-bit creation brought 2D adventure gaming to a new level of sophistication. *Super Metroid*'s pacing and world design are by all measures perfect, and there are so many aspects to explore here that the game retains its unique allure 15 years on.

Metroid Fusion (GBA – 2002)
Taking the *Super Metroid* template into the 21st Century, and again with Yoshio Sakamoto at the creative helm, *Metroid Fusion* found Samus once more facing the destruction of a game world. Only this time Samus was the knowing perpetrator.

Series highlights

Metroid Prime (GameCube – 2002)
Retro Studios' first-person adventure spin on the *Metroid* template sold 1.5 million copies in the United States alone, yet it simultaneously pushed Samus Aran away from Japanese sensibilities, guaranteeing a future of Western success at the cost of *Metroid*'s Japanese heritage. *Prime*'s unusual perspective and restrained style of first-person play carved out a niche for Samus in the next generation, cleverly sidestepping the FPS genre to find new ground.

Metroid Prime 2: Echoes (GameCube – 2004)
The first *Metroid* game to feature a multiplayer mode, although its inclusion was perhaps ill-advised, as it failed to really add anything of worth to the traditional single-player adventure. *Echoes*' greatest successes were in translating more of Samus's abilities, such as the Screw Attack, to a 3D context.

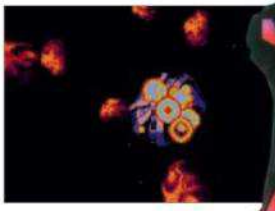
possible in the game, and as the core *Metroid* system was already in place we considered how we could make the game easier to play, what new ideas we could incorporate, and so on… Then we drafted in lots of other NCL and IntSys developers once we got beyond that stage and into the proper work."

There has always been a complex yet mutually beneficial relationship between Nintendo, then based in Higashiyama (to the northeast of the current Minami location), and Intelligent Systems, constantly situated in the eastern Kyoto ward of Higashiyama. Sakamoto refers to the team as "IntSys" and says that it had been helping Nintendo with the *Metroid* series since the initial FDS game, "as a second-party developer". While it's fair to say that the game design and play-testing abilities of NCL's in-house staff have always been some of the world's best, Intelligent Systems' developers were on hand to provide indispensable technical know-how, particularly focused on the hardware side of things.

"IntSys has always been very capable with hardware," Sakamoto adds, "so during the experimental stage we told the IntSys programmers what kinds of things we wanted to do and verified what in reality could be done. We'd been well prepared for the move

The open-ended gameplay meant that *Super Metroid* has become popular for speed runs

Super Metroid used the full range of special effects available to the SNES for its bosses and environments



to the Super Famicom hardware, so we had some idea of what to expect before we went into it; which features we should use, and how. I think it was good that we went through the prototype stage because it gave us a base onto which the post-experimental stage staffers could easily begin their work. At the time, the SFC was reputed to be difficult to develop for. Depending on how you partitioned the Super Famicom's video RAM, which looked after the sorting of image information, the scope of possibilities would change wildly. Knowing that you could diminish the VRAM's potential by poor partitioning was useful information, because it meant we could think about how certain things could or couldn't be achieved, and how we could work around those limitations.

"The nap room wasn't being cleaned at all. One morning staff woke us up and told us that the room smelled like a zoo"

As we were migrating from the Famicom to Super Famicom, really everyone – not just Nintendo but other developers too – seemed to be having fun testing the feature set of the new hardware. That went for us, too: I remember often thinking, 'Oh, I had no idea we could even do this!' The graphics and sound were fantastic, but we were still driven by wanting to [not] be outdone by the arcade games of the time."

To a man, the developers supplied by IntSys to work on *Super Metroid* were all programmers. In spite of the various backgrounds of the *Super Metroid* team, there was apparently no NCL-IntSys rivalry; no factions, just harmony and productive co-operation. Key team members from the Nintendo side included Makoto Kanoh, the producer, the guy who instigated the project; my interviewee, Yoshio Sakamoto, who was the director in charge of game design; and Tomomi Yamane, who was the figure Sakamoto regards as having been the 'main' designer: "He was very skilled and was particularly interested in the hardware stuff, consulting with the IntSys people as to what kind of images could be displayed."

Even though the team's objective was to build on the success of *Metroid* and *Metroid II*, only three of the original *Metroid* team, including Sakamoto himself, worked on *Super Metroid*: "The rest of

Series highlights

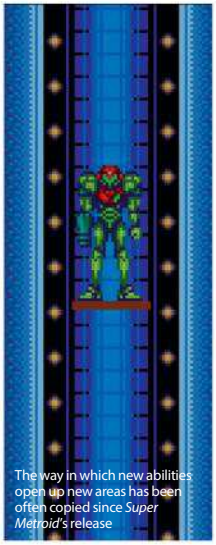
Metroid: Zero Mission (GBA – 2004)
Zero Mission's retelling of the first *Metroid* brought with it a *Fusion*-standard graphical upgrade. By this stage Samus's popularity in her homeland was at an all-time low, and unfortunately sales didn't reach six figures in Japan.

Metroid Prime: Hunters (DS – 2006)
Developed by NST, *Hunters* was one of the better first-person DS games, with a multiplayer mode that felt more natural than *Echoes*'.

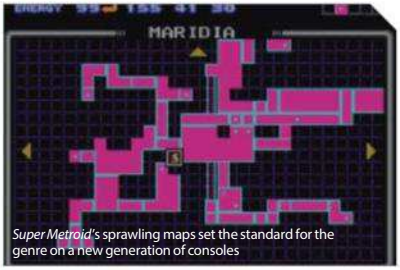
Metroid Prime 3: Corruption (Wii – 2007)
The final release in the *Prime* trilogy effectively brought the modern *Metroid* experience closer in line with the FPS genre, combining Remote-directed shooting and relentless action.

24 megabits, 7 modes

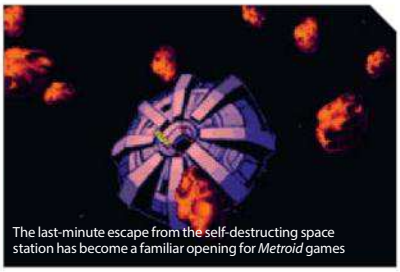
"We used all seven of the hardware modes available," Sakamoto tells me, although he doesn't explain precisely what that means. And how did you use the 24-meg cartridge that ended up housing *Super Metroid*, I ask? "I can't remember!" Sakamoto laughs. There's a pause. "We achieved wonderful graphics and sound by dedicating most of the memory to those features. Yes. Oh, and the game's maps were also quite large, I think. We made good, balanced use of the 24 megabits, anyway – that much I know for sure."



The way in which new abilities open up new areas has been often copied since *Super Metroid*'s release



Super Metroid's sprawling maps set the standard for the genre on a new generation of consoles



The last-minute escape from the self-destructing space station has become a familiar opening for *Metroid* games

the [NCL side] was made up of young trainee developers," he recalls. "Of course young people can be quite impertinent – and those on the *Super Metroid* team certainly were – but I think that's quite important in a way. These young people had enough about them to help us a lot. There were many different personalities in the *Super Metroid* team, which was a good thing. It was a harsh development environment, so I'm sure that some of the staff didn't enjoy the work, but generally the team was full of the 'Let's go for it!' spirit. I think that was partly because of the timing as well, what with the Super Famicom pushing everything to the next level."

The "next level" wasn't merely the notion of advanced graphics and sound: it was also a matter of the expansion and improvement of level design. However, Sakamoto and team were reluctant to make use of the storytelling methods utilised by RPGs and other adventure games. "We really didn't want to explain things to the player using too many words," Sakamoto states. "We just wanted to let them play and be able to work things out for themselves. For example, say there's a mechanism where you need to climb up a ladder and place a bomb there in order to advance, as one component in the solution of a [gameplay] riddle; if that was all you needed to do in order to get through to the next area, you'd miss all of the other mechanisms we'd put in place and wouldn't even

realise that certain parts of the game existed. We wanted players to explore everything we'd made and then move on. That's why we designed the maps in such a way that the player couldn't escape without exploration, or in such a way that the player would end up back at a starting point before advancing. The player would be cornered/driven and would eventually be forced to stop and say, 'Right, how should I think about this area?' That's the essential point of *Super Metroid*'s map design. Not using words meant that the player had to 'feel' his/her way through the game – and that's how we wanted it to be. When they discovered something new – a new item or new location – we wanted the player to feel that he/she had made that discovery independently, without help from the game."

R&D1 went to great pains to achieve the fine balance seen in *Super Metroid*'s item locations, puzzles, boss encounters, and in Samus's acquired abilities and inventory use. It wasn't simply the case that everything fell into position at the first attempt at design either, as Sakamoto reveals: "In a stage following on from an area where the player made lots of discoveries, we'd hold back from pushing the player too far in order to avoid repetition. Balance between difficulty level and player discoveries was crucial. We wanted to avoid creating an on-rails experience – we wanted the player to feel free. But it was incredibly difficult to get that balancing act right. We'd been designing levels in this way since the first game, so we had a lot of experience but we still needed to experiment and build and rebuild."

> "We didn't want to explain things to the player. We wanted to let them be able to work things out for themselves"

As well as being a *Metroid* debut for most of the team, *Super Metroid* marked the Super Famicom debut for all concerned. Naturally, this step up presented some hurdles that even the advice of IntSys couldn't equip the team to surmount. "One problem with the shift to the Super Famicom," Sakamoto says, "was that it meant we suddenly needed a lot more sprites and artwork, so we shared the map and enemy design responsibilities throughout the team,

Developer highlights

Donkey Kong Jr	System: Arcade, Famicom Disk System/ NES, etc Year: 1982
Kid Icarus (pictured)	System: FDS/Nes, GBA Year: 1986
Metroid	System: FDS/NES, GBA Year: 1986

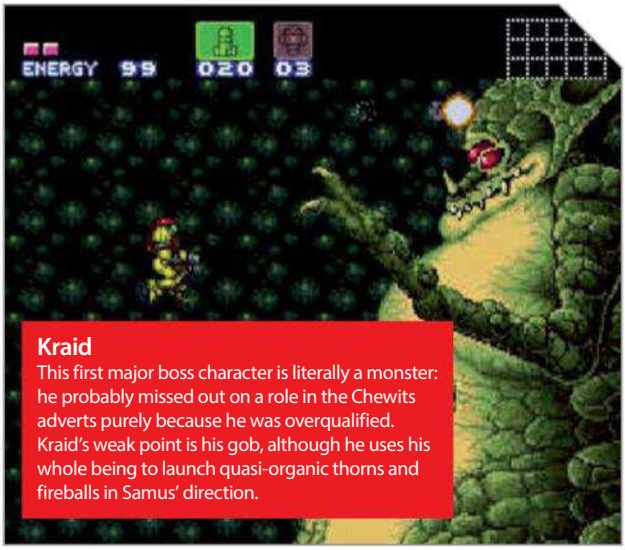
The big bosses

Phantoon

A good example of the Super Famicom hardware's transparency effects, Phantoon at times appears to be an apparition; this boss's trick is to flit between protected translucency and a devastatingly powerful solid state, and he likes to launch endless rounds of flaming blue orbs.

Draygon

This yellow-bellied, oversized crustacean is more than just a simple typo. Draygon is a mean swimmer, and its weak points are protected by the shell of a giant lobster. Slightly perversely, *Super Metroid* encourages you to vanquish Draygon by electrocuting it until its flesh turns a vivid shade of purple.



Kraid
This first major boss character is literally a monster: he probably missed out on a role in the Chewits adverts purely because he was overqualified. Kraid's weak point is his gob, although he uses his whole being to launch quasi-organic thorns and fireballs in Samus' direction.

with everyone making some input in those areas. But then doing that resulted in a complete mishmash of styles because of each designer's individual preference, so in the end I had to ask Yamane to retouch everything that had been submitted, bringing it all together as one consistent design."

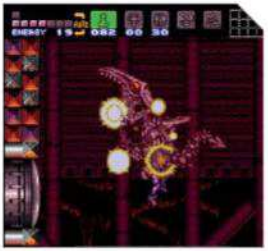
Remarkably, there was no friction within the team even during the frenzied last stage of development, although there was something of a bad smell: "During the final six months of development I didn't know where I lived any more; the Nintendo building – not here, but the old place [in Higashiyama] – became like a boarding house for the *Super Metroid* team," Sakamoto grins. "It got to the stage where I really don't remember going home at all! There was a nap room where it was okay to sleep, but sometimes it was full [of sleeping, overworked *Super Metroid* staff] – those were the worst times, when I wanted to sleep but couldn't, and I didn't have time to go home! There were always between ten and fifteen of us in the office through the night, so we had to take naps in turns. The nap room wasn't being cleaned or looked after at all, because we were always using it; one morning staff from another area came to wake us up and told us that the room smelled like a zoo. Another Nintendo employee put a room freshener in the nap room, but that only made the place pong even

worse. Everyone in Nintendo gave us funny looks," Sakamoto laughs. "It's quite sad having only these kinds of memories!"

Our talk turns from nap room stench to the wrath of a Nintendo demigod: Gunpei Yokoi. In his early 50s at the time of *Super Metroid*'s production, Yokoi was the game's general project manager but took a hands-off approach. Sakamoto remembers how his superior viewed *Super Metroid*: "Yokoi-san, who at the time was my section chief and who always had fresh ideas, was always angry when he saw us all completely absorbed and working crazy overtime on *Super Metroid*. He came in and said, 'Are you lot trying to produce a work of art or something?' [Laughs] But this was an epic and we were already way past our deadline, and it seemed we were getting progressively further from our objectives – Yokoi-san was becoming angrier with us day by day during that period. We weren't aware of it, but Kanoh was given a warning by Yokoi-san. Although he was really unhappy with us, and even though he wasn't the type to dish out praise, Yokoi-san was constantly playing *Super Metroid* once we'd finished it – he was hooked. He was playing it so much that I wondered what he was up to. [Laughs] When other developers brought their action games to Nintendo, he'd always compare them with *Super Metroid* and invariably ended up recommending that they 'go away and play *Super Metroid*'. That's how fond he was of our game. I suppose this is a better memory than the smelly nap room anecdote," Sakamoto laughs.

"*Super Metroid* was released in '94," he continues, "and development had taken between two and three years. I don't know how it was perceived throughout the company, but the timing was such that all teams were focused on putting out lots of new SFC games, so there was obviously some expectation that we deliver with *Super Metroid*. We definitely had a lot of support and understanding of the game's concept from people related with the project, and that helped to ensure that we did a good job." Which, as everyone who has played *Super Metroid* will attest, is a monumental understatement indeed.

The big bosses



Ridley

An homage – in name alone, obviously – to *Alien* director Ridley Scott, whose film was a major inspiration to the series, this senior Space Pirate appears once at the start of *Super Metroid* and again, in a more powerful – yet paradoxically also more vulnerable – form, towards the end of the game.

Mother Brain

The enigmatic final boss of *Super Metroid* is essentially a lump of deskulled brain. However, Mother Brain protects itself with dynamic weapons and the glass casing of a robo-suit, and when that fails, it connects to the neck of a bio-mechanical bodysuit. Afterwards, Samus again has to run for her life.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Wild Guns

Talk about not easing you in gently! The boss that awaits you at the end of *Wild Guns*' first stage is a ridiculous monstrosity that looks like it's been loaned out by Cyberdyne Systems. Dwarfing your puny-looking player, it alternates its attacks between tearing up the screen with an array of guided rockets and cutting a swathe of destruction with its immense Gatling gun. You frantically dash around, firing off round after round of hot lead with little impact on the metallic monstrosity's health. And then it hits you. Shoot for the core – all right, its head. With newfound purpose you direct your shots in a deadly hail of gunfire. The feeling of seeing it literally fall apart as you finally defeat it makes all the previous pain worthwhile.

Bio

Wild Guns was the brainchild of Shunichi Taniguchi. It's effectively Natsume's take on *Cabal* and *Blood Brothers*, but the Japanese developer mixes things up by having its Wild West theme infiltrated by a bizarre assortment of killer robots. Despite its excellent and engaging gameplay, *Wild Guns* is now quite rare, often fetching silly money on popular auction sites. Luckily, an enhanced update with four-player support and new stages is heading to the PS4.

Platform	SNES
Developer	Natsume
Released	1994

More Classic Wild Guns Moments

Boom, boom, shake, shake the room

The assault in *Wild Guns* is relentless. When not being attacked by cowboys riding on flying saucers, you're dodging giant robots that split open to fire missiles. Sometimes you just need to take a breather. *Wild Guns* may not be the first arcade-style game to feature a screen-clearing smart bomb, but we're pretty sure it's one of the most spectacular to gawp at.

The lone gunmen

Wild Guns comes into its own when playing with a friend. The sheer number of enemies means you'll need a decent system for crowd control or it'll all end in tears. Our top tactic is to divide the screen in half, with each player focusing on their own side to minimise casualties. Just don't cross the streams or you may well find yourself playing on your own next time.

Destruction corner

Pretty much everything on the screen can be interacted with in some fashion. Shoot a barrel and it explodes, bullet holes get left in crates, while chairs and tables become useless bits of wood. This OTT destruction is most noticeable in the saloon, where you can reduce bottles to smithereens and even obliterate a jukebox. We certainly wouldn't want to be left with that bill…

Comedy corner

Although it focuses on carnage, *Wild Guns* is also filled with fun little touches that can't help but raise a smile. One of our favourites is the comedy thwack you give to enemies that get too close, but if we had to pick one it would be the bush cowboys. These silly blighters comically appear in walking bushes, ready to take pot shots at you.

Mode 7 Heaven

We look back at some of the best and lesser-known examples of Mode 7, the famous graphics mode that became a hallmark for many early Super Nintendo releases and helped elevate Nintendo gaming during the Nineties

Super Mario Kart

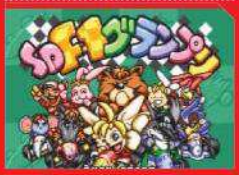
• Best Mode 7 moment: Rainbow Road **• Year** 1992 **• Publisher** Nintendo **• Developer** In-house

Though *F-Zero* was the first game to show the exhilarating things Mode 7 could bring to racing games, it was clear there was room for refinement. *F-Zero*'s glitzy, neon-coloured racer is certainly fast and pretty, but its racing gets shown up for being shallow when compared to *Super Mario Kart*. *Super Mario Kart* is *F-Zero* but with more intricate tracks, modes and sprites (characters, weapons, power-ups and annoying flat moles). It raised the bar of Mode 7 application, but it also spawned Nintendo's most successful-ever racing franchise. It would also be remiss of us to not mention that Mode 7 marks the first time the bright, vibrant and colourful world of the Mario franchise was presented in a way resembling believable 3D. That it was also immensely playable didn't do much to hurt its success either.

Blatant Super Mario Kart copycarts

Kat's Run

This obscure racer plays like a *Gran Turismo* take on *Super Mario Kart*. After picking your driver from the ten spiky-haired racers on offer, you select your vehicle and then compete in street races. Because *Kat's Run* is grounded in reality both visually and track-wise it suffers. With dull circuits and visuals, it is unfortunately one of the least impressive Mode 7 racers on Super Nintendo.



SD F-1 Grand Prix

The most blatant *Super Mario Kart* clone ever produced, SD F-1 Grand Prix stars a cast of cuddly super deformed (SD) critters and a few tracks which ape those in Nintendo's racer. As it sticks so close to the *Mario Kart* template it's unsurprising it's a decent racer. The irony though is that it's part of an established racing franchise (Video System's *F1 Grand Prix*) that predates *Super Mario Kart*. One of the more impressive Mode 7 racers.

Uchuu Race: Astro Go! Go!

The colourful eye-bursting result of what happens when you mix two parts *F-Zero* with one part *Super Mario Kart*, *Uchuu Race* is a bright, cutesy cartoonish future racer. The game's most notable thing is that you can turn your craft 360 degrees. As a result, the controls can feel erratic initially and make the more challenging pinball-style obstacle-packed stages quite frustrating. Overall though, it's a decent if imitative racer.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles IV: Turtles in Time

• **Best Mode 7 moment:** Foot Soldier fling • **Year** 1992 • **Publisher** Konami • **Developer** In-house

The most vivid Mode 7 scenes are often those that took us by surprise. Those moments we'd be sat playing game X and then all of a sudden a cool Mode 7 trick would materialize from out of nowhere. Though this SNES port features a great Mode 7 recreation of the arcade game's thrilling hoverboard stage, it's the Foot Soldier-towards-camera fling that stuck in our minds most. Capturing the slapstick nature of the cartoon perfectly, seeing it never gets boring. In fact, we'd even go so far as to say it's a frontrunner for the best Mode 7 moment ever.

Chrono Trigger

• **Best Mode 7 moment:** The crazy racing mini-game
• **Year** 1995 • **Publisher** Squaresoft
• **Developer** In-house

There are many examples of Mode 7 being put to good use in Square's epic time-travelling RPG *Chrono Trigger*, but our favourite is the Jetbike mini-game found in the Beyond The Ruins future chapter. While most racing games use Mode 7 to generate into-the-screen tracks, *Chrono Trigger* shows the effect being put to great use in a side-on racing scenario – although the shoulder buttons allow you to rotate the camera. The fun and challenging mini-game proved so popular among fans that Square later released a standalone digital version for the Sattellaview titled *Chrono Trigger: Jet Bike Special*.

Contra III: The Alien Wars

• Best Mode 7 moment: The opening stage **• Year** 1992 **• Publisher** Konami **• Developer** In-house

The foremost thing to remember about SNES Mode 7 is that its powers are ineffective on game sprites. However, Mode 7 can rotate and increase the size of background images to give the impression they're animated; to create a 'Mode 7 sprite' (a term we've just made up but feel is befitting). Developers are also able to go a step further by adding moving parts made of sprites to really mess with our heads. For two really good examples of this technique in action look no further than the epic first stage of *Contra III: The Alien Wars*, which is packed with Mode 7 moments. The low-flying plane that turns up midway through the game's first stage forms part of a background layer and is animated using Mode 7 (as it comes closer to the screen its size increases and its wings bank slightly). However, the bombs that it drops are sprites. Similarly, the body, neck and head of the turtle boss that awaits at the end of the stage also sits in the background, while the bullets it fires and moving legs are sprites. These are two of the best examples of Mode 7 being used by a developer to create believable animated objects in games.

Super Castlevania IV

• Best Mode 7 moment: Fighting Koronot
• Year 1991 **• Publisher** Konami **• Developer** In-house

The nightmare world of *Castlevania* is the perfect environment for Mode 7 to do its thing, and Konami put it to great use in *Super Castlevania IV*. Mode 7 can be seen in the game's map screen, its rotating stages, those cool rocking chandeliers on Stage 5 and even in some of its more memorable bosses. And this brings us rather nicely to our favourite Mode 7 moment in the game – the stone golem boss Koronot. Fought at the end of stage four, every time you hit him with the Vampire Killer he shrinks in size and causes the sky to hail stones. That is until you make that final killer blow and he expands to fill the entire screen.

Run Saber

- **Best Mode 7 moment:** Plane battle
- **Year** 1993 • **Publisher** Atlus Co.
- **Developer** Horisoft

Often dubbed as the Super Nintendo Strider, owing to starring two lithe plasma sword-waving heroes able to cling to walls and do fancy somersaults, *Run Saber* is an imitative but entertaining action game. Mode 7 was often used by developers as a way to insert something memorable to boss encounters, and this is demonstrated by *Run Saber*'s first boss. A battle that takes place in the sky, you have to fight a disembodied biomechanical Medusa head while clinging desperately to an F-14 Tomcat that loops in the air.

Demon's Crest

- **Best Mode 7 moment:** Getting around
- **Year** 1994
- **Publisher** Capcom
- **Developer** In-house

Demon's Crest is a superb action/platformer that is every bit as atmospheric and challenging as its famous cousin *Ghosts 'n Goblins*. The third part of the excellent *Gargoyle's Quest* series, *Demon's Crest* made this list purely for its neat world map, which, thanks to some Mode 7 magic, allowed you to navigate and land on it in *Pilotwings* fashion to replay stages.

ActRaiser

- **Best Mode 7 moment:** World map
- **Year** 1990 • **Publisher** Enix Corporation
- **Developer** Quintet

Anyone who has played this unusual city building hack-and-slash marriage will attest that its title screen really utilises Mode 7. Yes, it's just a spinning word, but it grabs your attention. For us though, the best Mode 7 moment has to be when you enter a new stage. Starting from high up in your heavenly hub palace, you see the camera spiral towards the overworld map and home in on the level.

Exhaust Heat

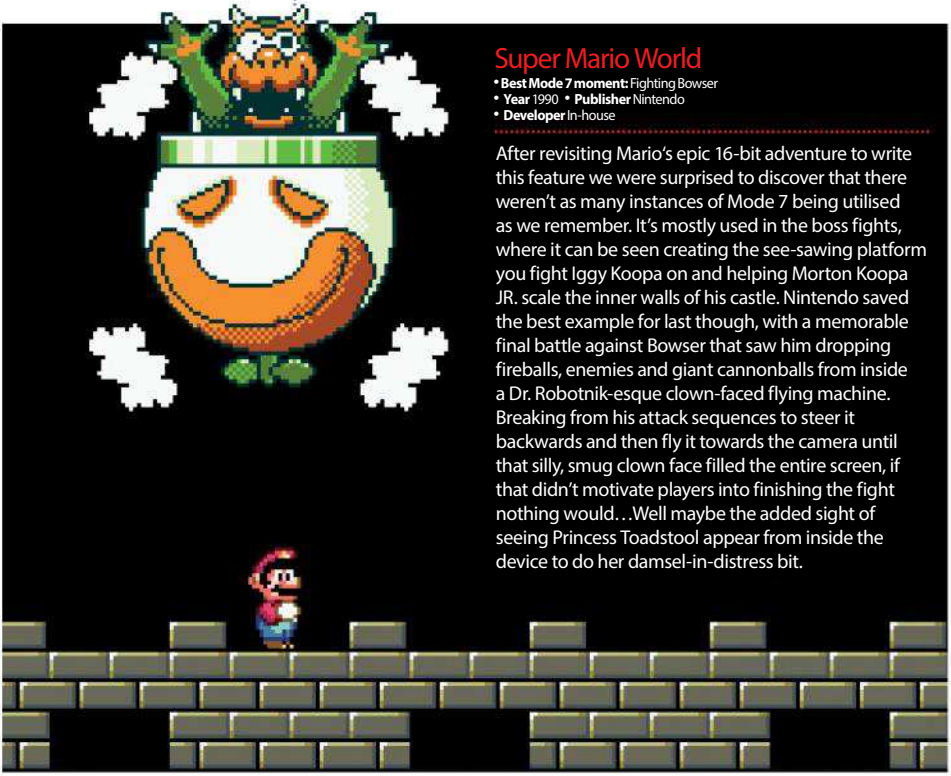
• Best Mode 7 moment: Pitting • **Year** 1992
• **Publisher** Seta Corporation • **Developer** In-house

Exhaust Heat is a very different racer to Nintendo's more famous Mode 7 offerings. Its charm and speed are slow coming, with its tracks (based on real circuits) feeling a bit empty by comparison and exhilarating racing only arriving once you've enough money to upgrade your car. But be patient, and you'll find that *Exhaust Heat* is a great racer with some subtle sim elements. Wonderfully presented throughout, our standout Mode 7 moment occurs when you enter a pit and the camera seamlessly rotates to the side of your car.

Super Soccer

• Best Mode 7 moment: Kick-off • **Year** 1992 • **Publisher** Nintendo • **Developer** Human Entertainment

While *Super Tennis* used Mode 7 in a subtle way – it was used on its intro screen and as a way to circle the camera around the court when players swapped ends, *Super Soccer* was much more blatant in its usage. The impressive looking but fidgety feeling football pitch certainly brought a few issues; the action felt a little sluggish, it wasn't always easy to judge passes and tackles, and for one half of the match you were running up a pitch you couldn't actually see. However, the jaunty graphics and unique perspective still won you over. *Super Soccer* isn't the greatest football game, but it certainly captures the fun nature of the sport, especially in multiplayer.



Super Mario World

- **Best Mode 7 moment:** Fighting Bowser
- **Year** 1990 • **Publisher** Nintendo
- **Developer** In-house

After revisiting Mario's epic 16-bit adventure to write this feature we were surprised to discover that there weren't as many instances of Mode 7 being utilised as we remember. It's mostly used in the boss fights, where it can be seen creating the see-sawing platform you fight Iggy Koopa on and helping Morton Koopa JR. scale the inner walls of his castle. Nintendo saved the best example for last though, with a memorable final battle against Bowser that saw him dropping fireballs, enemies and giant cannonballs from inside a Dr. Robotnik-esque clown-faced flying machine. Breaking from his attack sequences to steer it backwards and then fly it towards the camera until that silly, smug clown face filled the entire screen, if that didn't motivate players into finishing the fight nothing would…Well maybe the added sight of seeing Princess Toadstool appear from inside the device to do her damsel-in-distress bit.

Super Star Wars – The Empire Strikes Back

- **Best Mode 7 moment:** Battle of Hoth • **Year** 1993 • **Publisher** LucasArts • **Developer** Sculptured Software

The Battle of Hoth has been restaged in videogames numerous times, and most have provided great set-piece moments – or in the case of the 2600 an entire game. This epic Mode 7 stage was the most faithful recreation of the epic snow fight. With some stunning undulating Hoth terra firma to fly over, the mission tasks you with destroying a set number of varied targets, ranging from Probe Droids to AT-ATs. The stage then gets really awesome when it introduces AT-AT Walkers to the fight and allows you to take them down by cable-tying their legs together and causing them to trip over and kiss the snow.

Super Turrican 2

• Best Mode 7 moment: Worm boss **• Year** 1995 **• Publisher** Ocean **• Developer** Factor 5

Super Turrican 2 really puts the Super Nintendo through its paces. Though it doesn't have the *Metroid* feel of the 8-bit original, it's a real showcase of fancy Super Nintendo visual effects, and provides no shortage of great Mode 7 moments. Our choice picks include the giant Mode 7 Sarlacc-style worm boss that you have to fight from inside its gaping mouth, the superb robotic spider boss, and the neat into-the-screen racing/shooter sections. Developed by Factor 5, who is probably most well-known for the *Star Wars Rogue Squadron* series of Nintendo games, it's a truly fantastic shooter with visuals, imagination and set-piece moments that easily meet those high points of *Contra 3*, and Chris Hueslbeck's soundtrack is brilliant too. A polished and sensational shooter, it's just a shame that copies go for so much money these days.

Mode 7 mirrors

Mega Drive

The Mega Drive was unable to replicate Mode 7 but there are games that show the console doing impressive graphical tricks. For a similar rotational effect look at the top-down shooter *Red Zone* in action, or for some exhilarating into-the-screen shooting see *Burning Force*.

Atari Lynx

The Atari Lynx was capable of generating Mode 7-style scaling and rotation effects two years before the Super Nintendo. And the Lynx could actually even go one step better by being able to rotate and scale individual sprites too, an effect noticeable in games like *Pit Fighter* and *California Games*.

Sega Mega CD

Sega's ill fated CD-Rom add-on for the Mega Drive was capable of Mode 7 effects. Perhaps the most famous example is the 3D bonus stages of *Sonic CD*, which saw Sonic running in a 3D rotating world trying to get those pesky Chaos Emeralds.

Wings 2: Aces High

• Best Mode 7 moment: The map **• Year** 1992 **• Publisher** Namco **• Developer** Malibu

Namco's *Wings 2: Aces High* was set during WWI and made great use of Mode 7. Piloting a WWI biplane, you have to complete a series of bombing and dog fight missions that build up to an aerial battle with the German Top Gun, the Red Baron. Mode 7 is used here in two different ways: to create realistic 3D scrolling ground effects as you're flying through the air, and on the bombing missions to zoom the camera towards the floor as your plane flies towards it. The latter is particularly successful as the ground looks crisper the closer you are to it.

On The Ball

• Best Mode 7 moment: Goal!!! **• Year** 1992 **• Publisher** Taito Corporation **• Developer** In-house

On The Ball is an on point SNES conversion of Taito's superb 1989 arcade puzzle game *Cameltry*. If you're unfamiliar with it, your objective is to steer a ball through a labyrinth and reach a goal before your time limit expires. As the game progresses, the mazes become more devilish as more obstacles get thrown into the mix, including blocks that knock seconds off your time if you touch them, and traffic light gates that, well, we're sure you all know how traffic lights work. With your players rotating the maze rather than the ball in order to move it around, *On The Ball* was pretty much built for Mode 7. Thus it's a superb and faithful conversion of the original game, and though it could have benefitted from being a little bit longer, is still a must for puzzle fans.

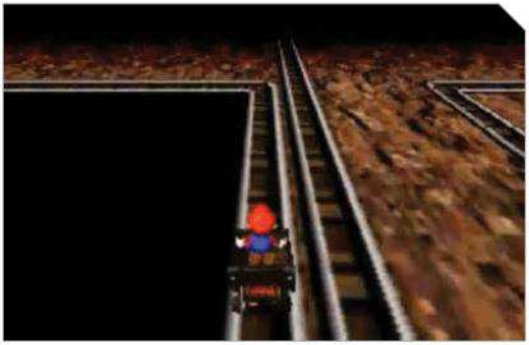
F-Zero

• Best Mode 7 moment: First track **• Year** 1990 **• Publisher** Nintendo **• Developer** In-house

While *F-Zero* may not be the most deep racing experience, if seen as Nintendo trying to show that its new console could easily handle an arcade-style racing game then it certainly achieves its goal. Said to be loosely connected to the obscure NES racer *Mach Rider*, which started its life as a plastic toy bike back when Nintendo was a toy maker, *F-Zero* was a perfect showcase for what the Mode 7 could do. Not only was *F-Zero* a launch game for the console but it was also the first game to utilise Mode 7, which here is used to create its stunning pseudo 3D tracks. Allowing the racing to feel incredibly fast and smooth as it wasn't pushing around intricate track and level designs – something which has remained a speed over detail hallmark for the series, nothing touched it in terms of exhilaration and visuals. It even left some arcade games eating its dust.

Super Mario RPG: Legend Of The Seven Stars

• Best Mode 7 moment: Mine car challenge **• Year** 1996
• Publisher Nintendo **• Developer** In-house



Super Mario RPG is packed with mini-games, but the Mode 7 mine car section is our favourite. It serves as both a neat distraction and way to take you to the next section of the adventure. As the car moves on rails (obviously), players have to collect mushrooms and coins and jump any breaks in the track. There are also two Mode 7 side-scrolling sections that add a bit of extra variety to the action too.

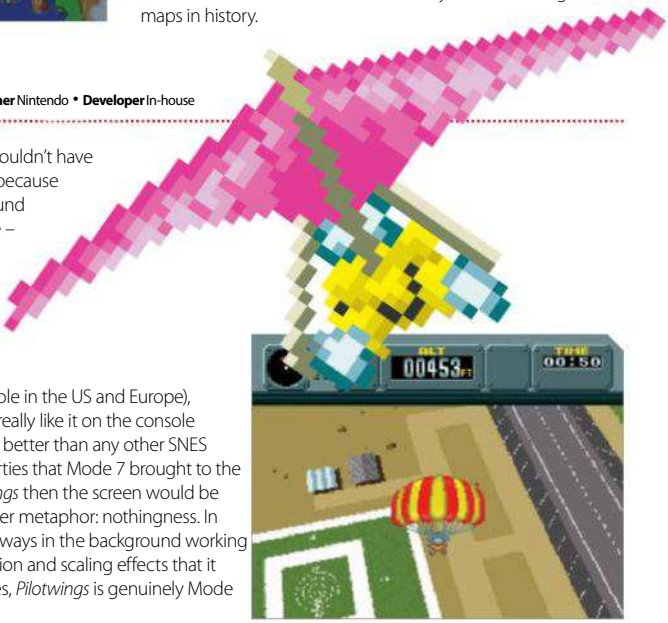
The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past

• Best Mode 7 moment: Map of Hyrule **• Year** 1991
• Publisher Nintendo **• Developer** In-house

Hyrule is such a big part of any *Zelda* adventure, so it seems fitting that Nintendo would want to do something special with the map screen. In *A Link To The Past*, the Mode 7 map plays a prominent part in its gameplay and story, with players not only relying on it to get around the huge world but also allowing them to see the full effects and differences between its light and dark incarnations. The SNES incarnation of Hyrule is without doubt one of the most iconic and fondly remembered game maps in history.

Pilotwings

• Best Mode 7 moment: Free falling **• Year** 1990 **• Publisher** Nintendo **• Developer** In-house



Whichever way you cut it, *Pilotwings* just wouldn't have been possible without Mode 7, and that's because here it isn't used to create a fancy background effect, boss or map, but – in a rare instance – an entire open-feeling world. By Nintendo choosing to base its game in a Flight School rather than the usual po-faced military scenario, it showed that flight sims could be universally fun and accessible. An early release for the Super Nintendo (it was a launch title for the console in the US and Europe), *Pilotwings* was unique. There was nothing really like it on the console market at the time, and it showed perhaps better than any other SNES game the immersive and engaging properties that Mode 7 brought to the table. If you removed Mode 7 from *Pilotwings* then the screen would be as empty and as black as space… or a better metaphor: nothingness. In *Pilotwings*, Mode 7 hardly ever sleeps. It's always in the background working away and showing off the impressive rotation and scaling effects that it could generate. For all intents and purposes, *Pilotwings* is genuinely Mode 7: The Videogame.

Contra III: The Alien Wars

It's without doubt one of the greatest Super Nintendo games of all time, one of the best games in the Contra series, and also one of the finest run-and-gun games ever

Oh, and did we mention that it's one of the best games ever too? One of our all-time favourite titles, *Contra III: The Alien Wars* is a masterclass in game pacing, outrageous set pieces and basically just all-round great level design. From the very minute you start the game, to the **sweaty, jubilation-filled second you finally beat** it on the hardest setting and see the game's ending, the action is relentless, the challenge high and the gameplay intense. Join us as we run down the most iconic moments from this classic. The year is 2636, and Stuart Hunt is helping two commandos, Sully and Jimbo, win **an epic alien war…**

Why it's a classic

Contra just got better

The original *Contra* reinvented the run-and-gun genre, introducing many elements that countless games adopted. The follow-ups prior to *Contra III* offered a decent helping of action, but they didn't measure up to the original. *Contra III*, however, marked a giant leap forward. It was everything you would expect from a *Contra* game, but with bigger weapons, bigger explosions, bigger bosses, a new post-apocalyptic setting and a motorcycle level. Set piece after set piece, the game was a tour de force of imagination, deft level design and special effects that hasn't aged a single day.

Best level

Start as you mean to end

With so many memorable moments in *Contra III*, picking just one was impossible. As the opening stage is a great example of how to grab a teenager's attention and make them part with birthday money, we had to mention it. Within the first few minutes you're gunning down aliens and mutant dogs, hopping into a tank to flatten foes, sampling nearly all of the weapons in the game, dodging a plane as it bombs the city, jumping through the flaming ruins while taking out a wave of winged aliens and finally facing off against a giant, bullet-spewing alien tortoise. It's one of the best opening levels of any videogame.

Best weapon

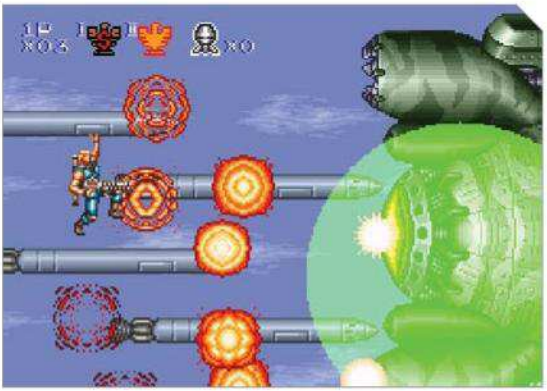
Smart bomb

Many fans will have their favourite weapon. Some love the laser. Others will like the weaker but lovely spread gun, as it makes killing foes an absolute breeze. There are others who will like the flamethrower, as it's great for when you get up close. Therefore, picking a best weapon is a bit of a thankless endeavour, and one we chickened out of by virtue of us going with the smart bomb. It might look like a metal turnip, but release it into the game's atmosphere and see the screen turn hazy, killing grunts with ease and knocking a large chunk off the energy of the game's bosses.

Best boss

The massive Terminator

There really was only one boss we could highlight here. And typical of memorable 16-bit bosses, it is something that didn't exactly err on the side of caution as far as copyright was concerned. The giant T-800-alike that rips through the level's wall at the end of the third stage is a tricky one. First, you see his claws pierce the wall, pulling it apart as if it was made of tinfoil, before seeing his beaming red eyes glowing in the darkness. The beast then emerges, firing lasers from its eyes, lobbing bombs into the playing field and breathing fire too. The only thing it doesn't do is ride a motorcycle and shoot up a police station.



Another best level

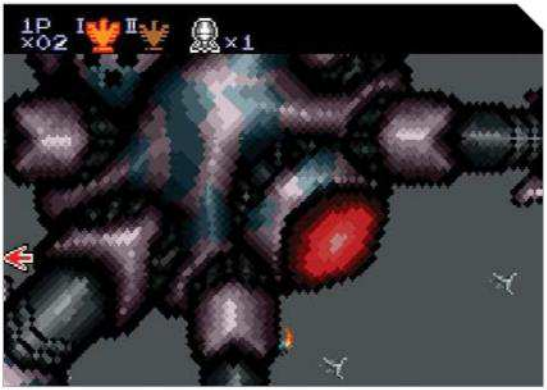
Motorcycle

Given that there are so many great action set pieces in *Contra III*, we had to give a mention to another of its fantastic levels. The motorcycle stage deserves a look in, as it's basically just one giant action set piece. The stage begins with the player astride a 2636 era Ducati, blasting flying aliens before a giant frigate appears, its undercarriage primed with heavy ordnance. Survive this vicious gauntlet and the ship takes to the air, you chasing after it. This leads on to the most insane bit in the entire game: blasting the ship's glowing arse while hopping between missiles being fired at it.

Best use of Mode 7

Arachnophobia

From the map in *A Link To The Past* to pseudo-3D like *F-Zero* and *Pilotwings*, the cream of early Super Nintendo games used the console's Mode 7 technique to show off the power of the console, and *Contra III* was no different, proving a great showcase of the versatility of the effect. It was used to create dazzling explosions, two top-down levels, and also several bosses. The first Mode 7 boss is a large robotic spider that scuttles along the floor before jumping into the air, scaling bigger and filling the screen before disappearing, and then making a quick descent in a bid to crush Sully and Jimbo.



Contra III armoury

Machine gun The default weapon in the game. It's pretty powerful and really quite effective at taking out much that the game throws at you.

Laser As laser-based weapons do, this fires a concentrated line of powerful radiation. It's highly powerful, but using it requires a good aim.

Spread gun Though the weakest weapon in the game, the spread gun makes short work of enemies attacking from different heights.

Crush missiles Blue in colour, these are the most powerful weapons in the game. They explode on contact, and are really effective against bosses.

Flamethrower The flamethrower is an effective close-quarters combat tool that is great for taking down bosses and cindering weak spots.

Homing missiles Moderately powerful homing missiles will hunt enemies down. It's a really effective weapon against the airborne aliens.

Classic Moments

In the know

Publisher	Konami
Developer	In-House
Released	1992
Genre	Run-and-gun

What the press said… ages ago

Mean Machines 95%

Anyone who doubts the abilities of the Super NES should take a look at this – it's unbelievable! The graphics, sounds, special effects and varied, highly addictive gameplay are all absolutely outstanding.

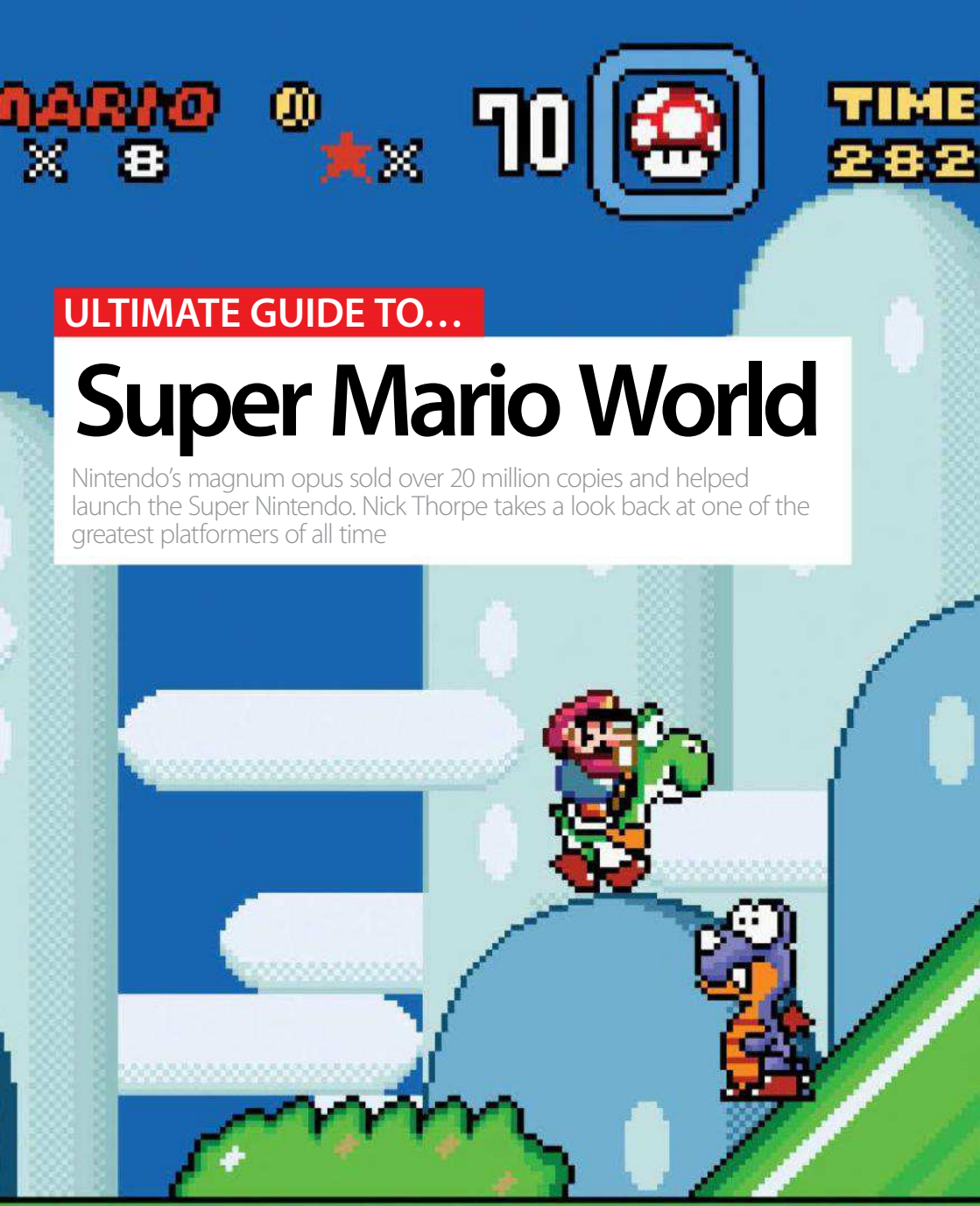
What we think

Standing alongside *Gunstar Heroes* and *Metal Slug*, *Contra III* represents the pinnacle of run-and-gun gaming, and has still yet to be bettered. It's an outstanding game.

ULTIMATE GUIDE TO…

Super Mario World

Nintendo's magnum opus sold over 20 million copies and helped launch the Super Nintendo. Nick Thorpe takes a look back at one of the greatest platformers of all time



Mario's new dinosaur pal stomps enemies efficiently, but gains far more from eating them

When Nintendo finally entered the 16-bit console race in November 1990, it was in the unfamiliar position of having to stake its claim to market leadership against real competition. The company responded in typical fashion, by launching the Super Famicom with possibly the greatest one-two punch in videogame history. The turbo-charged Mode 7 racer F-Zero offered plenty of substance, but its appeal hinged on style and the lure of the unfamiliar. It was Nintendo's way of demonstrating technological superiority. On the other hand, *Super Mario World* definitely looked the part, but its main function was to provide substance and familiarity (in fact, the game bore the subtitle *Super Mario Bros. 4* in Japan). With it, Nintendo intended to reaffirm its position as the world's leading developer of videogames – and it emphatically succeeded.

To advance the game past its superb predecessors, Nintendo assigned a mixture of veteran hands and new talent to develop *Super Mario World*. Of the 15-strong team that developed the game, nine were returning from *Super Mario Bros. 3* and one had previously worked on *Super Mario Bros. 2*, while the remaining five had no prior credits and injected some fresh insight.

The other major change was a new lead game director – in this case Takashi Tezuka, who had previously served alongside Shigeru Miyamoto as an assistant director and later co-director. Miyamoto himself remained on the development team, but stepped back into the less hands-on role of a producer.

As far as the basic game design is concerned, the team wisely decided not to fix what wasn't broken. The block-based level designs are familiar to anyone that has played a Mario game, and Mario's skills and abilities are largely drawn from *Super Mario Bros. 3*, albeit with a few tweaks. The variety of special forms was scaled back to Fire Mario and Caped Mario (a new form, but one functionally similar to Raccoon Mario), and Mario retained the ability to kick carried items but could not boot them skyward. Other than that, the portly plumber gained a new companion in the form of Yoshi, a dinosaur that will grant him a ride and eat quite a few of the enemies that stand in his way.

The major innovation of *Super Mario World* was its structure. *Super Mario Bros.* had introduced the concept of multiple stage exits with its Warp Zones, and *Super Mario Bros. 3* had introduced a world map

Secret exits are the one of the keys to *Super Mario World*'s long-term appeal (pun definitely intended)

The boss themes use the same melody as the action stages, but they're tweaked and feel completely different.

to the series. What *Super Mario World* did was to combine the two concepts into a non-linear experience. Whenever a stage had more than one exit, there was usually a good reason to seek that extra exit – at the very minimum it could lead to a secret stage, but it might also lead to a warp or even one of the game's Switch Palace stages. When completed, each of the four Switch Palaces activated appropriately coloured blocks throughout the game – you could tell where they were meant to be thanks to the appearance of their coloured outlines. Often they just made things a little easier by blocking off pits or providing extra platforms, but occasionally they would be crucial to making progress.

In retrospect, *Super Mario World* is surprisingly economical with its resources, given its status as a showcase game for a brand new console. Take the game's music as an example – Koji Kondo's soundtrack makes excellent use of theme and variation. When you first hear the overworld music, you get your first experience of a melody that persists throughout the entirety of the game, forming the basis for almost every piece of action music from the

This swarm of Bullet Bills is testament to the fact that there's a real challenge present

Pixel perfect

Your guide to the characters of Super Mario World. How many have you seen?

Hanging off a dangling rope while avoiding buzzsaws is a unique thrill – it only comes up once

Blargg is a sneaky foe, checking that you're approaching before it emerges from the lava

Ghost Houses typically offer simple obstacles but tricky navigation, requiring brainpower over quick reflexes

underground and underwater stages to the castles and ghost houses. Likewise, while it's always visually enticing, *Super Mario World*'s wealth of levels means that it inevitably reuses backgrounds and objects frequently. What's more, the game makes sparse use of the console's advanced graphical features – where other designers might be tempted to design in such a way that highlights them, transparency and Mode 7 scaling and rotation are only deployed where they make sense in the context of the game design.

That's the real genius of *Super Mario World*, though – it is a textbook example of a design team managing to make a lot from a little, because fresh ideas are never in short supply. You can take the scenic route through the game, taking in as many stages as possible on the way to the climactic fight with Bowser, and never encounter the contempt that repetition breeds. When you encounter a tense section in which you hop between moving platforms as buzzsaws hurtle towards you, that's the only time it'll happen. Even late in the game, you'll find new ideas, like a maze built from overlapping layers of moving rock. Those ideas which are re-used, such as the

Sumo Brothers are challenging – they'll hammer lightning downwards, setting the ground below ablaze

new puzzle-centric Ghost House stages, are presented in ways which leave each encounter feeling distinct.

What's all the more surprising is that this level of creativity is found in the series' fourth game. Some of this innovation can be attributed to the power of the SNES allowing the designers to do things that had previously proven impossible, and the addition of a save battery certainly enabled the enormous, interconnected game world to be realised. However, credit must also go to the development team for breaking new ground when it would have been easy to just provide a slightly prettier version of what had gone before.

But *Super Mario World* was all the more special because it represented the end of an era, as the last traditional 2D *Mario* platformer to hit a home console for many a year. *Yoshi's Island* was a marked departure from the traditional *Mario* style, and Nintendo took its mascot into the world of 3D for his next major console game. By the time Mario's side-scrolling adventures returned in the *New Super Mario Bros.* series, traditional pixel art and chiptunes had been left behind and things never quite felt the same.

According to your votes, *Super Mario World* is the greatest game of all time. It's not hard to see why, because it comprises all the things about gaming that people love. It looks nice, sounds wonderful and is masterfully designed, offering players an experience that can be enjoyed in whichever way they prefer. If you want depth and discovery, *Super Mario World* can give you that. If you want to make your way to the end as quickly as possible through brute force, that's allowed too. It represents familiarity, as a sequel featuring one of the most recognisable characters not just in gaming, but in all of pop culture. However, as a launch game, it also represents the thrill of new things – that unforgettable rush of excitement you experienced when you saw hardware doing things you'd never thought possible, and the unbounded possibilities that presented themselves in your mind as a result. It's a game that can be – and has been – enjoyed by players of all ages, from all over the world.

Shared nostalgia is what brings us together as retro gamers, and according to you lot, no other game appeals quite so broadly as this one. All hail Mario – the King Of Games.

Game Boy advantage

Super Mario World only has one non-emulated conversion and Super Mario Advance 2: Super Mario World is certainly interesting…

When Nintendo chose to bring *Super Mario World* to the Game Boy Advance back in 2001, it came across with a variety of changes. The most notable of these is related to Luigi. As well as using his revised sprites from the *Super Mario All-Stars* edition of *Super Mario World*, he's got his high jump and slippery run back from previous games. Other characters have also had a graphical touch-up, and the visuals have been brightened all-round due to the lack of a backlight in the original Game Boy Advance model. While the music has all been retained, there are definite differences in sound due to the differences in sound hardware between the SNES and Game Boy Advance. However, Mario, Luigi, the Koopalings and the Boos have all gained voices. There's also a brand new intro sequence featuring Mario, Luigi and Peach.

In terms of game design, a few changes have been made – Dragon Coins have been added to stages that didn't previously feature them, and your spin jump protects you from more enemies than in the original. Once you've encountered a coloured Yoshi, you can find them in regular stages by finding an egg with certain power-ups. Additionally, if you've got the cape or fire powers, taking a hit won't send you straight back to your small form. The game can also be saved at any time. No matter which version you play, *Super Mario World* is an amazing game, but the changes to later releases may cause purists to stick to the original SNES version.

Q&A: Robert Fennell

Known online as GreenDeathFlavor, this speedrunner shares his insight on demolishing Mario's finest game

When did you first encounter *Super Mario World*, and what did you make of it?

My first encounter with *Super Mario World* happened in 1992, when we got a Super Nintendo and my siblings and I were playing in the living room. I was a Mario kid – we had all of the *Mario* games. My best *Mario* memory is when I was first in our house to beat *Super Mario Bros.*.

What's your fastest completion time for *Super Mario World*, and how did you achieve it?

My fastest completion is in 9 minutes 47 seconds (9:47.58). I acheived that in January 2015, breaking a tie between myself and dram55 when we both had a personal best of exactly 9:48.98.

The run was done using a glitch in the game known as the 'cloud glitch'. When Mario collects a coin that Yoshi is about to eat, it gets replaced by the next available sprite, in this case, the Chargin' Chuck. Chargin' Chucks have the ability to give power-ups when eaten. In 2014, it was discovered that you can eat a Chargin' Chuck as small Mario and the game will give you a Lakitu cloud. The Lakitu cloud is useful because it can manipulate Bowser in the Bowser fight, making him stop instantly when it's moving off-screen to the left. This means you can complete the final battle up to a minute faster.

In January I finally got a solid run with a good Bowser battle which resulted in a new record which has stood for ten months now, but is beatable. The record could very well come down a full second or more with a perfect run.

Why is *Super Mario World* such a good game to speedrun?

I believe it's a good game to speedrun because it's a relatively easy game to learn. A lot of levels are beatable by just flying over them. There's also a lot of variety with this game. If you're looking for a fast easy run you can do any level. If you're looking for something a bit longer you can do no Star World. Of course, there's 96-Exit where you beat every level in the game. You could even challenge yourself with the no cape category.

Super Mario World offers visual cues – these slopes make the solution to this line of enemies obvious

What techniques are essential for any *Super Mario World* speedrunner to succeed?

You should play through the game a bit to get used to the game and its physics. Then practice every level and watch videos to learn new strategies. New runners can find videos for every level on **smwwiki.com**. I like to use a lot of visual and sound cues. I think it's important to find these cues for executing moves with tight input windows. When you have all the basics down you can begin to study and learn glitches if your goal is to get a fast time.

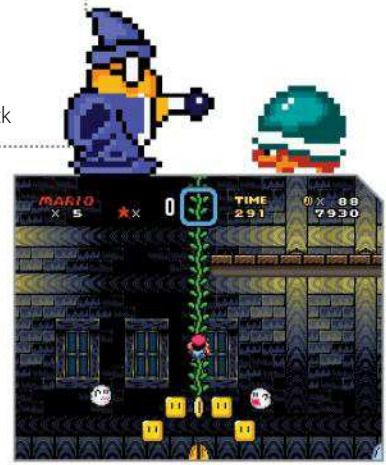
If you really get into *SMW* speedrunning and learn everything then it's all about the grind. You can't get record overnight, you need to put in a lot of attempts. When I first started I had times of over eleven minutes. It took me about a year and a half before I got world record in my category, so patience is definitely required.

The shortest road

Do you want to beat this classic, but are pressed for time? Worry not – with this guide, you'll have the game finished quick

1 Start with Yoshi's Island 2 and play normally until you reach Donut Plains 1. Once you get there, grab a cape from a Super Koopa. Use it to fly to the key near the end of the stage for a secret exit.

2 In Donut Secret 1, you'll need to find another secret exit – you can do this by finding a P Switch, then using it to turn these blocks into coins so you can retrieve the key from the Question Block.



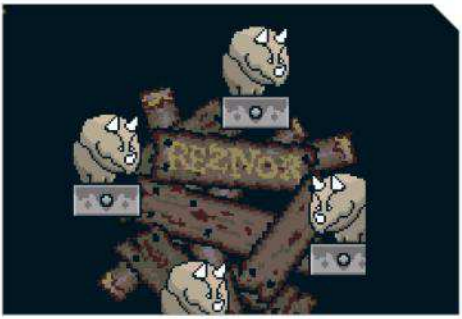
3 Donut Secret House has a hidden boss fight – you'll need to trigger this vine, pictured above, then use a P Switch to reveal a door at the top. Beat the Big Boo and you'll gain access to Star Road.

4 Beat each Star World stage by finding its secret exit. In Star World 2, you can acquire a blue Yoshi which gains the ability to fly when its mouth is full – make sure you leave the stage with it.

5 In Star World 4, use your Yoshi to fly beneath a section of blocks to reach the exit. You can now access Bowser's Castle and beat the game, having seen just 12 of the game's 72 stages.

Boss rush

What kind of hero would Mario be if he didn't bring down a few behemoths on his travels? Here's a rogue's gallery of the miscreants he comes up against in *Super Mario World*

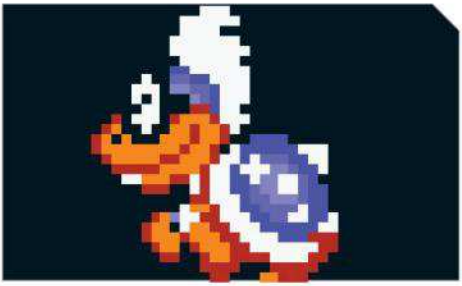


Reznor

This quartet of fire-breathing triceratops stands atop a set of rotating platforms. You'll need to bump them from underneath, but watch out! Once you've knocked a couple of them from their platforms, the ground beneath you will start to give way. If you can't take out the remaining beasts, you'll need to hitch a ride on their carousel in order to finish them off. Oh, and if you were wondering, Reznor is named after the Nine Inch Nails frontman, Trent Reznor.

Big Boo

Mario spends most of his time running away from these ghostly baddies, but the Big Boo resident in Donut Secret House is an aggressive sort. Unlike his compatriots elsewhere, he's capable of disappearing at will and is accompanied by a couple of regular Boos. You'll need to pick up Grab Blocks from below and throw them upwards at Big Boo, but they'll only hit when he turns visible. Three hits should be enough to see him off for good.



Iggy Koopa

After battling your way through Iggy's castle, you'll encounter him atop a tilting platform, floating in a sea of lava. What follows is a deadly sumo contest, as you try to push him into the molten rock while he tries to toast you with fireballs. When you jump on him, he'll always slide downwards – so ideally, you want to time your hits for when he's close to the edge and it's tilting down. Fire Mario makes this fight a walkover, incidentally.

Morton Koopa

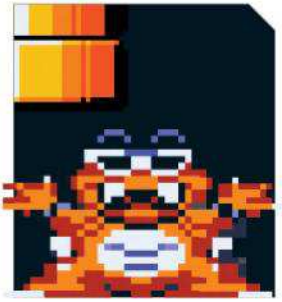
Your mere presence is enough to drive Morton up the wall – literally, as he runs towards the wall and then runs straight up it and onto the ceiling. Once he's up there, you'd better keep moving constantly as he's going to try to jump down onto you. When he eventually lands, turn the tables on him and jump on his head. Morton is probably the game's easiest boss, and a few hits will see this him off without much of a fuss.

Lemmy Koopa

Lemmy is quite happy to try to trick you rather than attack you directly, momentarily emerging from pipes while employing two decoys. The only real threats in this fight are the fireball lazily bouncing around the screen and the time limit, although the pipes do make movement slightly tricky. Thankfully, all you need to do is jump on Lemmy's head three times and you'll defeat him.

Ludwig Von Koopa

Hey look, it's a throwback to the original *Super Mario Bros.*! Ludwig is much like the Bowser of old, standing on the right of the screen and breathing fire at you, but now he's got a twist – a spinning backflip that makes getting behind him a less viable plan. Jump on his head a few times and you'll see him off. Incidentally, Ludwig boasts one of the few non-repeated boss templates.



Roy Koopa

Roy's fight is much like the battle against Morton, but harder – the walls are closing in, making for a far more claustrophobic work environment. He is defeated in exactly the same way.

"One of only two unavoidable boss fights in the game, Bowser has a variety of attacks"

Wendy O. Koopa

Wendy shares her brilliant plan with the hare-brained Lemmy, substituting the uneven pipes for a second bouncing fireball – so you face a greater threat, but with greater mobility. Jump on her head.

Larry Koopa

Larry has borrowed that fancy tilting platform from Iggy, and he's hooked up the lava fountain to spit up some nice deadly fireballs too. Use Larry's movement against him and give him a nice hot bath.

Bowser

One of only two unavoidable boss fights in the game, Bowser has a variety of attacks. He'll try to ram you with his flying machine, he'll drop fire on you, he'll roll giant metal balls at you and he'll lob Mechakoopas at you. The latter are important – to beat him, you need to lob them upwards on top of Bowser. After a couple of hits, Peach will give you a mushroom. Then rinse and repeat!

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Super Turrican

It wasn't always easy seeing your home computer favourites converted to consoles in the Nineties. Some conversions were just plain bad, and even the best ones tended to miss certain bits – *Speedball 2* might have played well on the Mega Drive, but the lack of "ice cream!" shouts left Amiga owners feeling that something was missing. *Super Turrican*, however, was a rarer beast. Not content with simply porting an existing game to the SNES, the team gathered the best elements of the series so far.

When *Turrican* veterans reached the first boss and a familiar iron fist hovered into view, those worries flared up again. Surely this tiny thing wasn't the best the developers could do? As it quickly transpired, it wasn't. The fist scaled to fill most of the screen, before shrinking down to a regular size and commencing attack. While its patterns were standard fare, the sight of the giant fist rotating to punch the ground was all the proof you needed that Factor 5 had taken good care of *Turrican* – and taken advantage of the host hardware.

More Classic Super Turrican Moments

Rock hard

When the screen locks in place and stone rain begins to fall, it's time to demonstrate your agility. Not only does the assault follow you as you sprint, but the rocks split into two as they land, widening the potential hit area. The shower might only last 20 seconds, but it's hard to get through without taking a hit – we'd advise rolling as much as you can.

Playing the angles

While the reflector shot isn't new, the carnage it can cause is always thrilling. With the right combination of positioning and some rudimentary geometry skills, you can hit any point on the screen, enabling you to take out dangerous enemies from positions of relative safety. But as satisfying as that is, it's undeniably more fun to indiscriminately fill the screen with bullets and watch things blow up.

Crush hour

No, that's not a claustrophobic delusion – the walls really are closing in on you. It's a race against time as you hop from platform to platform, with diamonds placed tantalisingly on the central footholds to lure you into danger away from the safe routes. Eventually though, you'll be hopping up one or the other as it's impossible to escape with much time to spare.

Heart of the alien

The alien setting of the final stages is clearly inspired by the work of HR Giger and is oozing with grotesque details, such as the pulsating background and salivating aliens. But it's the horror of the biomechanical train that lingers in the memory – you'll need to dodge barriers and shoot aliens, while watching out for fires and gaps between the carriages.

Bio

When Factor 5 took on the daunting job of bringing Manfred Trenz's masterwork to the SNES, it approached the project as a kind of greatest hits compilation. *Super Turrican* brought together level themes from the first two games in the series while adding a couple of new ones of its own. The game also included a new freeze beam attack which replaced the staple lightning whip and was capable of halting enemies temporarily. Factor 5 would go on to develop Super *Turrican 2*, which would become the last of the official *Turrican* games as later efforts fell by the wayside.

Platform	SNES
Developer	Factor 5
Released	1993

RPG Heaven: The greatest SNES RPGs of all time

During the infamous 16-bit console wars, both the Mega Drive and the Super Nintendo had their strengths that attracted gamers. One such strength of the Super Nintendo was the sheer amount of high-quality role-playing games available for it. Here we take a look at some of the best and most celebrated titles to grace Nintendo's machine

Terranigma

• **Released** 1995 • **Published by** Enix (JP) Nintendo (PAL) • **Developed by** Quintet

Terranigma is something of an oddity in the Super Nintendo RPG library. It was first released in 1995 in Japan under the title *Tenchi Sozo*, which translates as 'The Creation of Heaven and Earth'. A year later it was localised by Nintendo for the PAL markets but somehow never saw a release in America. This was extremely rare as most SNES RPGs made the trip to the US first and only a handful ever made it to PAL territories, a fact that explains why *Terranigma* now commands very high prices when bought online.

Terranigma is an action RPG that tells the story of Ark and his quest to resurrect life on Earth. It uses a top-down view and a fairly simple, but quite deep, real-time combat system. Ark has plenty of abilities such as dashing, jumping, sliding, guarding and an unusual magic system. For example, you must find Magirocks, which are taken to the magic shop to be turned into consumable spells. Once used, the spells turn back into Magirock and can be taken to the shop again. The game moves at quite a pace, even for an action-based RPG. Ark is instantly controllable and responds to commands on a whim, making him a joy to control.

The meat of *Terranigma* involves the resurrection of Earth. Once you complete the first five towers at the start of the game, the continents of the world are restored and Ark travels to the mainland in order to kick-start life. Your first task is to revive the plant life to enable nature to begin its journey. Ark can converse with the plants and they will guide you to revive the animals and then eventually mankind. This is predominantly achieved by travelling to various parts of the world to complete dungeons, gain items and trigger the multitude of story events.

The reason *Terranigma* is so good, though, is down to expert execution of various elements by developers Quintet. It manages to tell a wonderfully moving story and mix in plenty of original elements within the genre. For example, once you revive mankind, you are tasked with building the economies of the continents by helping residents make discoveries and then introducing them to different cultures. The plot is quite unique because you play a large portion of the game with no real enemy. Normally in RPGs there is a defining evil from the very beginning of the game, but not so with *Terranigma*, which unravels with a level of skill not seen in many console games of the time. It's filled with deception, regret, love, religion and science and told with excellent pacing. *Terranigma* also features superb graphics that vary from dank, desolate landscapes to vibrant jungles. The animation is excellent, character designs are attractive and the boss fights are impressive. The music is also superb, one of the best soundtracks of the generation for sure. We're praying the game gets a Virtual Console release so it can be enjoyed by those who missed it the first time around. This is probably the most anticipated game on the service now *EarthBound* has been released. *Terranigma* is an all-time classic that despite commanding high prices is worth a place in any SNES owner's collection.

Soul Blazer

• **Released** 1992 • **Published by** Enix • **Developed by** Quintet

Seen as the first part of an unofficial trilogy that features both *Illusion Of Time* and *Terranigma*, *Soul Blazer* is an action RPG based around the theme of resurrection. Essentially a dungeon-crawler, the player is tasked with freeing the souls of lost humans which, once released, rebuild the towns around them on your way to defeating the evil Deathtoll. The game tells a simple but poignant story that has the power to draw the player in. Combat is also rather simple but somehow it all works like a dream because it's fast-paced, with plenty of enemies and some excellent boss battles. A forgotten gem you need to experience.

Mystic Quest Legend

• **Released** 1992 • **Published by** Square (US/JP) Nintendo (PAL
• **Developed by** Square

Developed by Square and aimed as an entry-level RPG, *Mystic Quest Legend* was notable for being the first *Final Fantasy*-themed game released in the PAL regions, although it was a spin-off rather than actual canon. Despite being dramatically cut down in the overall gameplay department, *Mystic Quest Legend* is absorbing and enjoyable mainly thanks to its fun battle system and some fantastic music. There are no random battles here, as enemies are onscreen and a battle starts when you touch them. The game is also littered with optional battle arenas for levelling. With plenty of items, weapons and enemies, it's a simple but enjoyable experience.

Breath of Fire II

• **Released** 1994 • **Published by** Capcom (NA/JP) Laguna (EU)
• **Developed by** In-house

Superior in almost every way to its predecessor, Capcom's *Breath of Fire II* is another quality SNES RPG. The majority of the game is viewed from a traditional top-down perspective, but battles are viewed from an isometric viewpoint that features fantastic sprites and glorious special effects. Combat is turn-based and features random battles, but the pace remains fast enough to avoid frustration. Centring around now series-staple characters Ryu and Nina, Ryu has the ability to transform into a dragon, which is one of the most interesting parts of the game. Despite a sluggish start and occasionally iffy translation, *Breath of Fire II* picks up pace to evolve into a truly great RPG.

Front Mission

• **Released** 1995 • **Published by** Square • **Developed by** G-Craft

Released only in Japan in 1995, *Front Mission* still managed to gain a cult following in the West and was finally released in an officially translated form in North America during 2007 on Nintendo's DS. The game is an RPG of a tactical nature with linear game progression and a deep, entertaining plot. Set in 2090 and revolving around the colonisation of a fictitious island in the Pacific Ocean, *Front Mission* tells a tale that's as intriguing as it is fresh. The battle system is mostly in the usual tactical mould, however when attacks are performed, the game cuts to a close-up of the target in question for some spectacular visual effects.

Illusion Of Time

• **Released** 1993 • **Published by** Enix (JP) Nintendo (World)
• **Developed by** Quintet

Despite being another action RPG, *Illusion Of Time* is quite a different beast to many similar games. Eschewing many staples of the genre, such as experience points, currency or equipment, *Illusion Of Time* centres around Will and his alter egos in a plot to uncover the secrets of the Tower of Babel. After adventuring to the Tower with his father, disaster strikes and Will returns to the village alone with no recollections of what happened. The game begins in earnest when Will gains the ability to make his first of two transformations. His power can be increased by collecting jewels dropped by enemies, but this unique skill can only be done once per room.

Secret of Evermore

• **Released** 1995 • **Published by** Square • **Developed by** In-house

In 1995, Super Nintendo fans were hugely anticipating *Secret Of Mana 2*. Instead they got *Secret of Evermore*, a game developed by a team in America that Square had set up solely for creating it. After the initial disappointment that *Mana 2* was not coming, *Secret of Evermore* turned out to be an excellent take on the *Mana* gameplay system, but with a contemporary setting in America. The plot is based around time travel and involves an unnamed boy and his dog while featuring plenty of clever B-movie references. What we love about *Secret of Evermore* is that it is packed with interesting ideas. Each region has a different currency, which can be converted at certain vendors and as you travel to each time zone, your dog takes on a different form relevant to that zone. Magic is based around alchemy, so you have to create your spells before you can cast them. The dog can also be used to sniff out ingredients for you, delivering another nice touch in a game that's littered with them.

Ogre Battle

• **Released** 1995 • **Published by** Enix • **Developed by** Quest

One of the most important things about *Ogre Battle* is that it launched one of the most successful careers in Japan, namely Yasumi Matsuno, who went on to create several mega hits, two of which scored 40/40 in Famitsu. The other most important thing is that it's also an excellent strategy RPG, although it plays out more like an RTS title, such as *Command & Conquer*, upon entering battle. *Ogre Battle* has plenty of depth when preparing for combat. It features a tarot card system that can be used to add certain effects at various times. There's an alignment system that's a play on the good/evil theme, a day/night cycle that affects how certain classes or cards perform in fights and more than 70 different classes of units to control. Set to a gripping, politically motivated plot and boasting some lovely visuals, *Ogre Battle* comes highly recommended to anyone who like a challenge.

"It features a tarot card system that can be used to add certain effects at various times"

Chrono Trigger

• **Released** 1995• **Published by** Squaresoft • **Developed by** In-house

This epic RPG was developed by Squaresoft and featured a creative team that had fans of the genre salivating. Hironobu Sakaguchi, the creator of *Final Fantasy*; Yuji Horii, creator of long-term rival Enix's *Dragon Quest*; and Akira Toriyama, artist of *Dragon Ball Z* and *Dragon Quest*, were all lead designers on the project. This led to *Chrono Trigger* being massively anticipated by Japanese and Western RPG fans alike. We're pleased to say this masterpiece delivered on all counts. The first thing you notice about the game is the very *Dragon Ball Z*-style art. It's striking compared to the sombre styling of *Final Fantasy VI*. Characters have wild spiky hair, colours are vivid but retain a realistic style that sits somewhere between other popular Squaresoft games.

On the surface, *Chrono Trigger* seems like any other Japanese RPG, however it contains several important innovations that set it apart from them. The first of these is the complete elimination of random battles and the separate battle plain. Enemies are visible at all times, so once you come into contact with one the battle begins and plays out on the same screen, rather than cutting to a battle map. This helps to not only avoid the frustration of random encounters, but also allows the level of immersion into the world to remain high without the jarring change of scenery.

The next major innovation is its many multiple endings. *Chrono Trigger* features no fewer than 14 different endings to discover, many of them accessible through the excellent New Game Plus feature that's now standard on many of today's games.

Throughout the game, lead character Crono travels across various time zones ranging from 65000000BC to 2300AD. This gave the developers a real freedom to create very diverse and interesting locations, ranging from the dinosaur-infested forests of the past to the malfunctioning domes of the future. The story itself is excellent with intriguing enemies, genuinely heart-felt moments and a great translation that still stands up today. *Chrono Trigger* is a masterpiece of game design and it hasn't aged at all since it was first released in 1995. Anyone with even a passing interest in the genre should check it out immediately. Just be aware that it's a little on the pricey side.

Super Mario RPG

• **Released** 1996 • **Published by** Nintendo • **Developed by** Squaresoft

Super Mario RPG is a landmark title in many different ways. On the one hand it was a stunning collaboration between Nintendo and Square, but on the other it was one of the last Square-developed titles on a Nintendo platform for some time. The first thing new players should do when starting the game is to watch the brilliant Attract mode. This gives players a great idea of the sheer amount of superb ideas that have been crammed into it. Featuring a mix of action platforming and turn-based combat, *Super Mario RPG* is a fast-paced, absorbing adventure, which is incredibly accessible to even the most novice of RPG fans. Visually the game looks 32-bit, as it features similar rendering techniques to *Donkey Kong Country* and a distinctive 3D isometric viewpoint. The music is suitably twee but never annoying as expected from now industry legend, Yoko Shimomura. If there is one thing that *Super Mario RPG* does so well, it's that it highlights Squaresoft in its prime and how big a deal it was when Nintendo finally lost the talented developer to Sony.

Shadowrun

• **Released** 1993 • **Published by** Data East/Laser Beam
• **Developed by** Beam Software

One of the most unique titles on the SNES, *Shadowrun* combines action RPG-style gameplay with elements of the point-and-click genre that was popular on computers at the time. Set in the not-too-distant future, your task as Jake Armitage is to track down your missing identity and to find the person that wants you dead. The cyberpunk setting feels very fresh on the console, the isometric visual style is nicely detailed, while the music is suitably matched and well composed. Piecing together the plot is a hugely compelling experience, while talking to NPCs opens up new conversational opportunities to help you through this more adult Super Nintendo RPG.

"The cyberpunk setting feels very fresh on the console, the isometric visual style is nicely detailed, while the music is suitably matched and well composed"

Secret Of Mana

• **Released** 1993 • **Published by** Squaresoft • **Developed by** In-house

Secret Of Mana is a hugely popular action RPG and for good reason. Squaresoft's game features sumptuous graphics, incredible music and a stunning three-player mode that instantly made it stand apart from other RPGs of the time.

First released in 1993 and a follow up to the Game Boy classic *Mystic Quest*, *Secret Of Mana* captivated audiences from the get go. It tells a simple story of a young boy who discovers a mysterious sword that he pulls, Arthur-like, from solid stone. It turns out that Mana, the lifeblood of the land, is being drained by the enemy in order to control the world; leaving the hero to energise the failing Mana Sword and hopefully restore balance to the land. Visually, *Secret Of Mana* is stunning, with some of the best visuals to be seen on a 16-bit system at the time. Locations are diverse, ranging from desert plateaus, bustling villages and evergreen forests, with Upperland being a standout location, as you literally walk through the forest as the seasons change from one to the next. Sonically the game doesn't disappoint either. The music in the opening sequence is still one of the most stunning in gaming, even today. Using sampled pipes, bass and various synthesised sounds among others, *Secret Of Mana*'s soundtrack is diverse, often beautiful, yet dark and dramatic when it needs to be. At its core, it's an action RPG featuring character levels, weapon levels and magic levels. Eight weapons are available to the player, which can be upgraded throughout the adventure.

Magic too comes in eight forms and covers a variety of traditional elements. The biggest aspect of the game, however, is that it can be played by up to three players using a multi-tap. This is something that has rarely been done since, which is disappointing, as it completely takes a usually solitary experience and livens it up immensely. On the downside, when in single player the AI can cause a few minor issues, although its behaviour can be adjusted. Ultimately though, *Secret Of Mana* is another classic RPG for Nintendo's 16-bit console.

EarthBound

Released 1994 • **Published by** Nintendo • **Developed by** HAL/Ape

EarthBound is certainly one of the most interesting titles for the Super Nintendo. On the surface it appears to be fairly simplistic, but the more time spent with it, the more you realise just how unique it actually is. In fact, there's nothing else quite like it on any 16-bit console. Set in modern-day America, *EarthBound* is a Japanese take on the American lifestyle with often-hilarious results. It tells the story of Ness and his friends and their adventure to defeat the evil Giygas, the leader of an alien invasion on planet Earth. The graphics have a simple but extremely charming style to them, coming across like a cute Saturday morning cartoon. The world itself is presented in a pseudo-3D style and is completely seamless from one location to the next – very uncommon within the actual genre. The fighting system is generally standard, but the actions of characters during fights will leave players grinning from ear to ear, as they're so entertaining. Despite a fairly slow pace, *EarthBound* is an incredibly charming and wacky game that deserves to be played through. It's now available on Virtual Console, meaning you'll no longer have to shell out over £500 for the original game.

Seiken Densetsu 3

Released 1995 • **Published by** Squaresoft • **Developed by** In-house

Despite never being released outside of Japan, *Seiken Densetsu 3* has built up a huge following over the years, with many fans that are still desperate for an official translation. There are many reasons for this, but the most obvious are its graphics, which are achingly beautiful and easily sit alongside some of the best 32-bit 2D RPGs.

Like its predecessor, *Secret Of Mana*, *Seiken Densetsu 3* is an action RPG with deep combat and a multiplayer option, although it only supports two players. It's packed with many unique features, however, including a branching story arc, absolutely huge bosses and a day-and-night cycle with each day based on an element that affects magic as a result. Unfortunately, *Seiken Densetsu 3* never made it to the West because of a few technical problems in the game's code, but it has been translated by fans and is fully playable in English, although sourcing a Japanese copy is still worth doing.

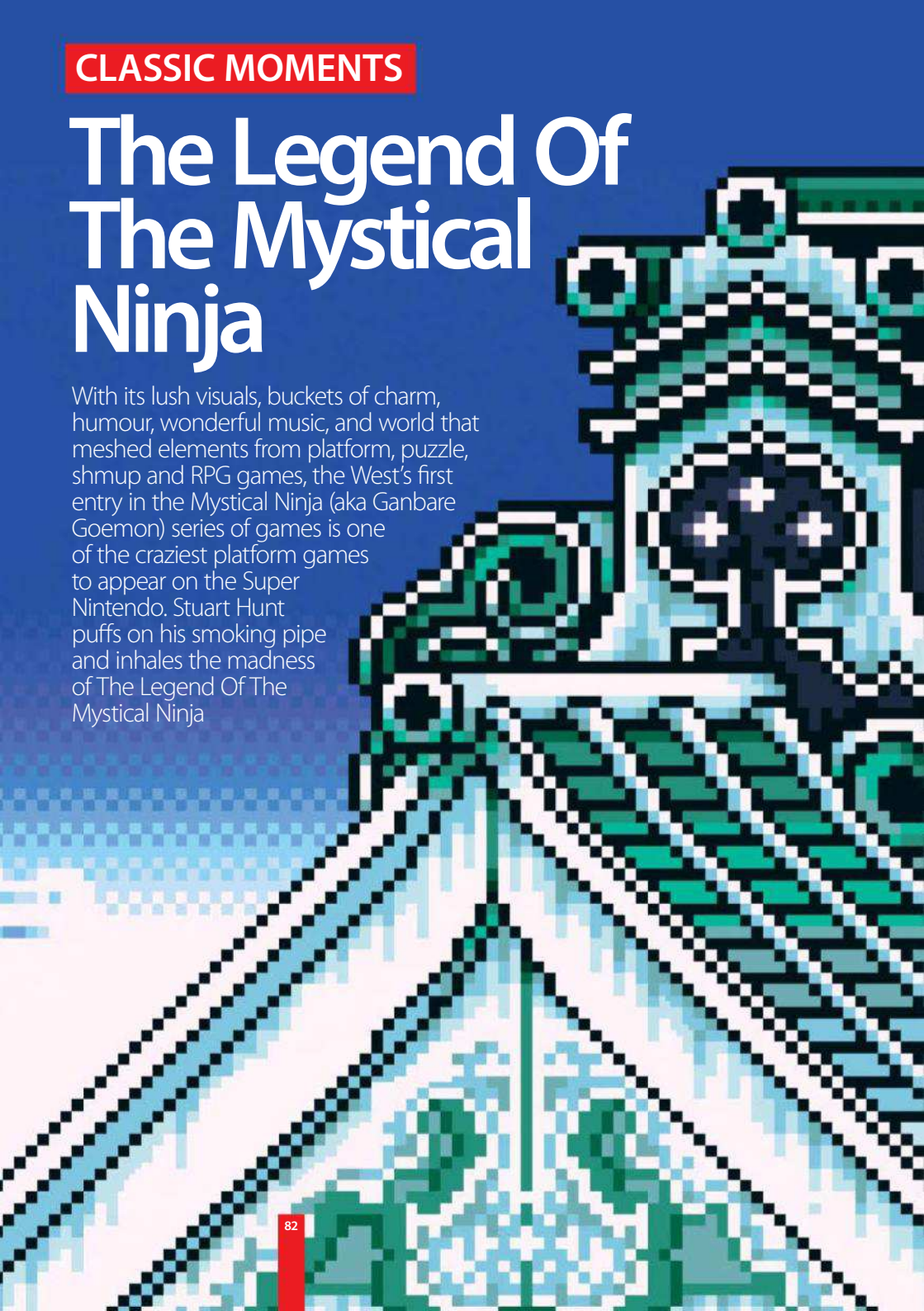
Final Fantasy VI

• **Released** 1994 • **Published by** Squaresoft • **Developed by** In-house

Leading up to the release of *Final Fantasy VI*, Squaresoft was building a massive reputation in the RPG scene. Enix, developer of *Dragon Quest*, was the most popular in Japan at the time, but *Final Fantasy VI* certainly marked a shift in Square's favour. It was simply an astonishing package, which was wonderfully ambitious with its storytelling and dark themes. Couple this with glorious visuals and a critically acclaimed soundtrack and it's no wonder *Final Fantasy VI* is often heralded as the best game in the series by American and Japanese audiences. The plot is quite dark and at times even depressing, as you work your way through the many areas of the game, meeting hundreds of interesting characters along the way. The central character of the story is a young girl called Terra. When you first meet her she has been brainwashed by the evil empire and is being controlled in order to attack Espers (magical beings) and wipe them out. Once free of the empire, Terra goes on a journey of discovery to find out where she is from and rediscover her forgotten memories. Along the way some absolutely magnificent characters are met: Shadow the ninja with his trusty canine sidekick Interceptor; Edgar the King Of Figaro, who has an eye for the ladies; Ultros who is apparently octopus royalty; and Kefka, the antagonist of the game and none other than a court jester! Kefka aims to defeat the Espers to take control of the magic and indeed the world. It's the duty of the player to stop him. Along the way, themes of love, regret, isolation, desperation and many others are carefully explored. Squaresoft did an excellent job with such a deep plot and it still impresses today. Plot aside, *Final Fantasy VI* plays out much like traditional Japanese RPG with active turn-based combat and plenty of random battles. With 14 playable characters and masses of customisation, it's an all-time classic that is climbing in price and desirability.

The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja

With its lush visuals, buckets of charm, humour, wonderful music, and world that meshed elements from platform, puzzle, shmup and RPG games, the West's first entry in the Mystical Ninja (aka Ganbare Goemon) series of games is one of the craziest platform games to appear on the Super Nintendo. Stuart Hunt puffs on his smoking pipe and inhales the madness of The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja



Why it's a classic

It has something for everyone

Easily the best aspect of *The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja* is the sheer amount of variety that Konami managed to cram in. Bursting at the seams with character and diversity, the second you boot the game you are greeted by wacky and humorous enemies and bosses, a world brimming with things to discover, and various little nods to other Konami franchises. You can't help but get immersed in the world. While the game can admittedly be a slow burn to begin with, this is largely due to the game throwing so much at you so quickly. Once you settle into the game you can't help but be captivated.

How does it play?

A game of two halves

The basic gameplay of *Mystical Ninja* is divided into two sections. The first section of each stage is reminiscent of titles like *Jack The Nipper* and *Everyone's A Wally*, and takes its cues from the NES series. Set inside various hamlets, full of quirky and often bizarre enemies, these sections show off the amount of effort that Konami put into the game. The second sections are more typical side-scrolling platformer bits, with tricky jump sequences, imaginative levels, and a large array of enemies and bosses to duff up. The contrast of the two styles works well to offer a platform game with far more character than its peers.

Best mechanic

Kid Ying and Dr Yang

First introduced in *Ganbare Goemon 2* on the Famicom, one of the best elements of *Mystical Ninja* was the fact that two players could play through the game together as Goemon and his odd sidekick Ebisumaru, named Kid Ying and Dr Yang respectively in the West. Save for signature weapons, the differences between the two are nominal, but the co-op mode does have its benefits. The characters can ride on each other's backs, allowing one to focus on attacking while the other moves. While this may sound a little awkward, it makes negotiating the trickier platform sections in the game a little bit easier.

Best boss

Memories from a geisha

There are plenty of memorable end-level bosses in the game, so picking one wasn't easy. In the end, we went with this thing: a chubby samurai tag team that changes into a giant floating head that looks like Gordon Brown made up to look like a geisha girl. Admittedly, we picked this boss entirely for that reason. If you're looking for a more sensible motive from us then we also like the way that whenever you hit this thing it grows until it envelops the entire screen, like something from a Roald Dahl story. It makes your job hitting it easier, but avoiding getting smothered by its chilling smile is much harder.

Standout moment

More than you can shake a pipe at

One of the best elements is the sheer amount of stuff there is to see and do in the town sections. You can place a bet on a horse race, partake in a quiz show, explore some cavernous 3D mazes, or even play some mini-games, including a one-level version of Konami's classic shooter *Gradius*. While rarely necessary to actually go exploring inside the towns – in all of the stages bar one, if we remember rightly, you can dash through these sections to reach the platform bits – these asides are a great way to replenish health, stock up on lives or simply take a much-needed break from the action.

Best power-up

Cat statues

Look out for the grey kitten statues that are randomly dropped by enemies, as they power up your weapons. Ying bonks his enemies on the noggin using a smoking pipe, while Yang uses his flute. The first phase will extend them, offering you a better reach, and the second will transform them into a yo-yo for Ying and a party blower for Yang. As well as this, each character can also use the money they find as a projectile weapon – a neat feature – and several different judo moves too, ranging from temporary flight and an attack that smites multiple enemies on screen, to a neat animal companion to ride on.

The evolution of Goemon

Mr Goemon, Arcade, 1986

For his arcade debut, originally Goemon's look took cues from traditional Ukiyo-e paintings. The game was a quirky side-scrolling run-and-jump game that played similarly to the platform sections in *The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja*.

Ganbare Goemon, Famicom, 1986

For Goemon's first console release, the Ukiyo-e look was dropped – though it remained in the game's box art – in favour of a more anime-looking cartoon sprite. We think the white parts in his eyes maybe make him look a little angry, though.

Ganbare Goemon 2, Famicom, 1989

The Famicom sequel, which was the first to introduce the co-op mode and Ebisumaru, opted to make Goemon look like a character in the comic strip Peanuts, with a change of hairstyle that he would keep in subsequent exploits.

Legend Of The Mystical Ninja, SNES, 1991

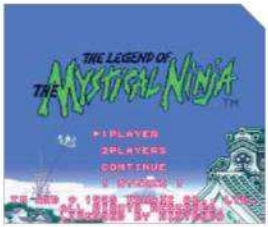
The added muscle of the Super Nintendo allowed Konami to breathe more personality into the character. This the first incarnation of Goemon with his blue-tinted hair and red and yellow outfit.

Ganbare Goemon 2, SNES, 1993

The Goemon sprite in the SNES follow-up to the original didn't really deviate much from the original. The only notable difference is that the sprite looks more detailed, slightly chunkier and has spikier hair.

Ganbare Goemon: Shin Sedai Shuumei, PlayStation, 2001

A series reboot of sorts, this PlayStation game reimagined the *Goemon* world by setting it in the distant future and going all *Dragon Ball* in the looks department, hair and all.



In the know

Publisher	Konami
Developer	In-House
Released	1991
Genre	Platform

What the press said… ages ago

Mean Machines

"The Japanese excel at producing cutesy-style games, and *Goemon* must rank as one of the finest examples yet, with brilliant sprites and varied backdrops."

What we think

Mystical Ninja hasn't lost any of its charm. Actually, we found returning to the game as enjoyable an experience as when we first discovered it many moons ago. The graphics still look great, the music is still toe-tappingly catchy and the humour is still funny. A timeless classic, then.

Super Mario Kart

Broomy, brm, brooom!

Do you remember Mode 7 from back in the day? Anyone who owned a SNES should, since it was one of the hotter gaming buzz-phrases along with "16 mega-baps", "parallax groping" and "defibrillated joysticks." Well, depending on where you lived. The above examples I'm told were popular in Swedish SNES magazines.

Mode 7 wowed us with pseudo-3D japery, but in reality it was little more than a massive flat image being rotated, panned and zoomed; close up the imagery became a deranged mass of blocky pixels – we can't even bring our eyes to look upon *Pilotwings* anymore, for fear of sullying our memories. But hark, pad junkies, for there are some Mode 7 games which can still captivate despite their archaic means of display.

The racing genre was well served by Mode 7, with two excellent examples. The first was *F-Zero*, a futuristic racer which focused on driving skill and straight-line racing, which is regarded as a classic. It was minimalist in design, uncluttered and refined, but it lacked a two-player mode. Two years later Nintendo released *Super Mario Kart*, the complete antithesis to *F-Zero*; it represented the other side to the racing coin and balanced things out nicely.

SMK featured more intense and frenetic racing; it had short-cuts, sudden crashes, wild wacky weapons, and a roster of Nintendo characters. It also kick-started the kart-racer sub-genre, bringing it to the masses and making them love it. The one-player mode was excellent and provided a great challenge, but the real draw was the game's two-player modes: Grand Prix co-op, standard racing, or the ultimate destroyer of friendships, Battle Mode! How can anyone claim to have been a SNES gamer if they'd never experienced this magical rite of passage?

Publisher	Nintendo
Released	1992
Genre	Kart Racer
Featured Hardware	SNES

1
00' 00" 57
x 3
x 05
8
2
00' 00" 59
x 3
x 05
7

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THE MAKING OF

Super Star Wars trilogy

The Super Star Wars games remain the only movie trilogy to make it onto a single console. We spoke to director Kalani Streicher about the epic saga

Cast your mind back to a time not so long ago when the SNES and Sega Mega Drive were the game console kings, and a certain Mr. Lucas had given us a mere three instalments of his interstellar movie juggernaut; the bona fide sci-fi classics *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*, and another one with Ewoks. Released in 1992, *Super Star Wars* was a state-of-the-art mix of platform action and 3D shoot-'em-up sections, culminating in the famous X-Wing trench run – arguably the best interactive experience the franchise had yet seen. It became an ace in the sleeve for Nintendo's battle against Sega, and a future benchmark for action games on the SNES.

"I started working at Lucasfilm Games in 1988 as a designer/programmer," recalls Kalani Streicher, producer and lead designer of the *Super Star Wars* trilogy. "At the time they were trying to expand into the European markets and looking for someone who was fluent in German. I fitted the bill and they hired me immediately. My first project was Zak McKracken And The Alien Mindbenders with lead designer David Fox. As we were finishing the game I started working on porting and localising all of the story games such as *Maniac Mansion* and *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade* into various European languages on a variety of platforms." After building up and managing LucasArts' localisation department, and a brief programming stint on Brian Moriarty's Loom, Kalani finally asked the question many working at the company had been itching to for years. Lucasfilm had previously shied away from entering *Star Wars* territory for its gaming releases, the nearest it had come being an abandoned attempt at a point-and-click adventure from Hal Barwood, designer of *Indiana Jones And The Fate of Atlantis*.

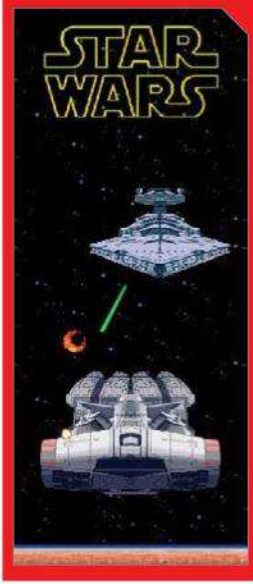
In the know

Publisher	JVC / NINTENDO
Developer	LUCASARTS / SCULPTURED SOFTWARE
Released	1992-1994
Genre	Run-and-gun

Super Star Wars trilogy

In the beginning

"You can't start a *Star Wars* game without the crawler. That's inconceivable!" says Kalani of his homage to the famous opening of *A New Hope*. "I wanted the game to start exactly the same way as the movie, with the text crawler and the camera pan to the spaceship and planet. I wanted the player to truly believe they were watching a movie and immersing themselves immediately in becoming Luke Skywalker. The in-game cut-scenes were directly from the movies and/or photo archives. For me, the cut-scenes had the purpose of grounding the player to the authenticity of the movies, and then let them interact and explore the environments as they were playing the levels"



"Lucasfilm was very focused on the PC platforms, such as the IBM, Mac, Amiga and Atari ST," explains Kalani. "A bunch of us wanted to work on console games and a handful of them wanted to work on *Star Wars*, including myself. Basically we asked our manager, Steve Arnold, 'Why aren't we on console, and why aren't we developing *Star Wars* games for it?" He replied, 'Do you guys want to do it? Go for it!' And off we went building a *Star Wars* game for console." Kalani teamed up with Utah-based developer Sculptured Software, producing *Star Wars* for the NES, a game based on the plot of the first movie which became a template for the later SNES title and its sequels, *Super Star Wars: Empire Strikes Back* and *Return Of The Jedi*. The relationship with Sculptured would remain for all three games.

"My vision was to create the first trilogy on a single platform for our fans," Kalani tells us. "We were slightly behind the curve getting onto the SNES, though in the end we pulled off the release of each game from the trilogy back-to-back, year after year, which I'm very proud of." As an avid gamer himself, Kalani demonstrates admirable taste when revealing the titles that inspired his first SNES project. "I was a big fan of platform games and side-scrollers," he says. "*Contra*, *Super Castlevania*, *Turrican* and *Mega Man* on SNES were my favourite games. I was also playing the *Willow* arcade game, which inspired me to push the visual quality on the SNES above other games. I wanted it to be as good a side-scroller as *Contra* or *Castlevania*, with the visual quality of arcade games such as *Willow* or *Street Fighter*, and vehicle gameplay using Mode 7 as seen in *F-Zero*."

Nothing's gonna stop Han getting to the Millenium Falcon; not even whatever this thing is

The lush backgrounds of the Dagobah sections are some of the prettiest in the series

Mode 7, the SNES's unique and much-touted graphics mode, allowed for the rapid manipulation and scaling of a background 'landscape', the first instance in *Super Star Wars* being the early landspeeder stage, as Luke travels towards a Sandcrawler encountering a bunch of really annoying Jawas. Though primitive by modern standards, the use of this technique made recreating seminal vehicular *Star Wars* moments possible in a way that wowed gamers of the time. Later series highlights would include the Hoth Snowspeeder vs. AT-AT battles of *Super Empire Strikes Back*, and the gripping dash of the Millennium Falcon through the bowels of the unfinished Death Star Mk II in *Super Return Of The Jedi*.

"I wanted to allow players to interact with their favourite *Star Wars* vehicles in third or first-person perspective, and experience the different aspects they'd seen in the movies," says Kalani. "You might say we were the first to combine genres of side-scroller and third/first-person vehicle combat for the SNES. I didn't want to utilise the vehicles in a side-scrolling or top-down fashion. I wanted the player to feel like they were in the vehicle racing across the desert or through the galaxy."

The series succeeds in recreating the atmosphere of the films remarkably well, from the opening text crawl over Tatooine in *Super Star Wars*, to the Lucas-esque

Developer highlights

Maniac Mansion (pictured)

System: Various consoles and computers
Year: 1987

The secret of Monkey Island

System: Various consoles and computers
Year: 1990

Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis

System: PC DOS, Mac, Amiga
Year: 1992

X-Wing

System: PC DOS, Mac
Year: 1993

The Cantina boss is based on one of the creatures in the film's holographic chess set

Moseying around Mos Eisley offered a whole lot of shades of beige to enjoy

This ED-209-looking lumbering monstrosity guards the Death Star hanger bay

Han attempts to escape the Carbonite freezing chamber. Hasn't he watched *Empire*'s ending?

screen wipes and imposing rendition of John Williams' score. Each game closely follows the plot of the relevant film, transitioning through platform sections with memorable bosses like the Sarlacc Pit Monster, Boba Fett, and the Rancor, and interspersed with story-progressing cut-scenes. With rich characters, creatures and vehicles to draw on from the films, the team took pride in attempting to present an authentic *Star Wars* console experience. "I looked at every aspect of the movie in detail with the team and pointed out the environments and characters I wanted in the game," says Kalani. "We used reference materials and photos from Lucasfilm's photo library, and took reference pictures of the actual movie models from the Lucas Archives. Everybody on the team was a hardcore *Star Wars* fan. I was also producing the X-Wing game at the same time, which added even more extensive research of every spacecraft and ship

"We were the first to combine genres of side-scroller and third/first-person vehicle-combat for the SNES"

in the game. I was heavily entrenched in getting the authenticity of the *Star Wars* universe into these games."

"Though from the beginning I wanted to retell the story of the movies in an interactive fashion," he continues, "I also knew, being the *Star Wars* geek myself, that I wanted to bring in elements that never were explained or expanded upon in the movies, especially areas or characters that were mentioned briefly in the films, such as fighting the *Star Wars* chess monster as a boss in the Cantina." Kalani is quick to praise what he describes as the "terrific relationship" between Lucasfilm and Sculptured Software over the course of the three games. "We were in control of all creative aspects of the game such as game design, art and animation, and Sculptured was responsible for coding the game," he explains. "Sculptured had a great engine, tools and development kits that allowed us to rapidly create levels and character animation. [Lead programmer] Peter Ward at Sculptured was an incredible engineer and a true *Star Wars* fan. I had such a blast working with him. Initially I created a design document outlining all specification and progression of the levels, characters and vehicles from the first to last level. We then did storyboards for the plot progression, cinematics and story panels. My concept and art lead

Harrison Fong storyboarded a lot of them, which we then passed on to the team and converted it into digital artwork."

In the original *Super Star Wars*, one of the early stand-out platform stages involves Luke making his way to the top of a Sandcrawler brimming with hostile turrets and pesky Jawas. "We did several iterations on the Sandcrawler and wanted to make the player feel like they were climbing up a huge vehicle and that the level was moving as you are jumping from platform to platform, "says Kalani. Later stages give players an opportunity to control alternate heroes, such as Chewbacca in the Cantina stage, or Han Solo taking on hordes of stormtroopers en route to the Falcon in Mos Eisley. A ride in Han's iconic galactic rustbucket, a daring rescue, and a brush with a trash compacter later the famous Death Star run awaits you. "We knew from the start that we had to have this level, and this was the climax of the game," says Kalani of the famous X-Wing sequence. "It had to live up to the then-in-the-arcades *Star Wars* game trench run.

For *Star Wars* nerds, Boba Fett's Slave 1 is pretty much the coolest boss in the game

Heart-stopping moments

Super Star Wars

R2-D2 has been captured by Jawas, and Luke must battle to the top of an enormous Sandcrawler, then through its dingy, hazardous innards to rescue him.

From farm boy to starship pilot, young Skywalker's final challenge is the terrifying Death Star trench, and a face-off with Vader's TIE Advanced.

Super Empire Strikes Back

As the Empire attacks the Rebel base on Hoth, Luke grabs a snowspeeder and attempts to take down an incoming battalion of giant AT-AT walkers.

The climactic showdown high on the gantries of Bespin sees Luke having to draw upon all his newly-acquired Jedi skills in order to defeat his old man.

Super Return of the Jedi

Mean, bad-tempered and certainly no oil-painting, the Rancor will leave you wondering if breaking into Jabba's palace was such a good idea after all.

In the Millennium Falcon, Lando Calrissian redeems himself with a daring raid on the unfinished Death Star II in the memorable finale of the saga.

Critical reception

What the gaming press thought…

"There's a mini *Star Wars* revival on right now, bringing with it lots of good things – books, a fab comic, one brilliant PC game (*X-Wing*) and this, not only the best film game on the SNES, but a real contender for best of its type on any system."

- Super Play 1993

The SNES and its Mode 7 feature were perfect for this and allowed us to give the player an incredible climactic moment."

Working with Mode 7 proved a mixture of trial and error on *Super Star Wars*. "It was our first attempt to utilise Mode 7 in a different way than other games," Kalani explains. "The landspeeder stage had to show progression, moving across a desert towards the mountains in the distance. It was a fine balance of sprite usage for the terrain, enemy characters and distant parallaxing of the mountain range. We had to take that one step further with the X-Wing level, flying across the surface and then down the trench allowing the player to be able to move anywhere in space. And lastly integrating the Millenium Falcon took several iterations. It is such a unique ship that we fairly quickly ran out of sprites/tiles. We had to pull off every trick we had in the book for those sections." An interesting note Kalani offers is that the atmospheric section set inside the Death Star nearly didn't make it into the game. "That level was difficult to pull off and barely avoided the chopping block," he remembers. "I remember contemplating many times cutting it, but I am glad that we found a way to make it work and keep it in the game."

For the sequels, Lucasflim and Sculptured continued to refine their game engine, packing in more content and visual advancements with the help of increased cartridge capacities. The finale, *Super Return of the Jedi*, was the largest; its 16-Megabit cart was twice the size of the original *Super Star Wars*. But the desire to innovate was not without its share of technical difficulties. "We were constantly pushing the SNES and adding as much content as possible from the *Star Wars* universe from one game to another, challenging and trying to outdo ourselves each time. In *Super Empire* the most challenging parts were of course the AT-AT /snowspeeder levels and the Millennium Falcon. These are iconic vehicles that needed to behave and feel like they did in the movie.

"For the AT-AT sequence, using Mode 7 for such a big vehicle was difficult. We were definitely pushing the capabilities of the SNES hardware. The cable release and circling of the snowspeeder was incredibly hard. We spent many long hours refining the gameplay to make it work. And in *Super Jedi* the speeder bike scene and final flight through the inside of the Death Star wasn't easy. For the speeder bike chase the most difficult part was creating believable trees moving past at high speeds. Because of the difficulty I

A mysterious masked bounty hunter causes havoc in the halls of Jabba's Palace…

considered many other design perspectives such as isometric or top-down views, but they never felt as dramatic as the Mode 7 version." One gameplay aspect that was greatly improved for both sequels was the addition of RPG-style character development, with Luke gradually gaining a number of useful Force Powers including the ability to heal, levitate, deflect attacks or even mind control enemies. The downside is that powers can be only be collected from certain locations in each game, meaning they can be easily missed by the not-so prudent Jedi. "Balancing the Force Powers wasn't easy," admits Kalani. "We had to anticipate players getting through a level with or without them. For me it was an integral part of character evolution and player progression (levelling up of a character) in adding Force Powers in *Super Empire* and *Super Jedi*." For *Super Empire Strikes Back*, the platform stages on Hoth added an extra dimension of difficulty due to the slippy-slidey nature of the planet's icy terrain. "This was our first attempt to add a 'slippery' factor to gameplay," Kalani comments. "It was difficult to test because of the many ways to slide into objects and assure proper collision. We also had to work hard on making the tiling of ice pieces look organic and not too repetitive. I enjoyed all the levels and am glad we added Han Solo and Chewie throughout these

For Star Wars nerds, Boba Fett's Slave 1 is pretty much the coolest boss in the game.

Super Empire Strikes Back puts you behind the controls of the iconic Millennium Falcon for the first time

You too can control a hyperactive four-foot teddy bear

levels." However, these stages, along with some of the more sprawling levels and fearsome bosses of both sequels, still attract criticism for their difficulty, despite the addition of level passcodes.

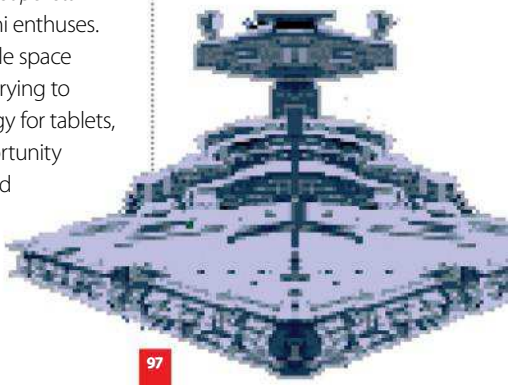
"I get that a lot," chuckles Kalani. "These were difficult games. We were aiming at the hardcore. Everybody was a hardcore player back then! I definitely could not deliver such difficult games today. In hindsight, I would reduce the enemy damage by 10-20 per cent, make the player character able to absorb more damage, add more power-ups and improve level design. Though I wouldn't want to make it too easy – it has to be challenging. The player needs to feel like they are earning the Force. My excuse for the difficulty of those games in Yoda's words is: 'You are not a Jedi yet. Much training you will need!'" Overall, Kalani tells us that there isn't much he would change about his trilogy. "I'm very happy how the games turned out," he admits. "We did an incredible job getting this trilogy out back-to-back each Christmas. There are a couple of elements I wish we could have incorporated if we had more time, such as the levels, characters and bosses we had to cut from the game – with each game we built more levels than we actually shipped. I'd also make the games a bit easier to play. I'm very fond of the *Super Star Wars* trilogy and very pleased with its popularity. They were my very first games and we had such fun designing and developing them."

We asked Kalani if he had any favourites out of the many great *Star Wars* moments found across the trilogy. "There are so many favourite moments," he replies. "A lot of them had to do with gameplay as well as the technical challenges they presented. In *Super Star Wars* my favourites are the landspeeder and trench run levels. In *Super Empire* it's definitely the snowspeeder/AT-AT level. Who doesn't want to take down and AT-AT? That was incredibly difficult, but we managed to pull it off. One of my favourite levels is also the Carbonite Freezing Chamber playing as Chewbacca. You had to keep moving and were fighting jet troopers, stormtroopers with shields and bombs, various bounty hunters and the little pesky Ugnaughts. The Darth Vader levels were also a treat. It's so emotional going up against Vader no matter how pixelated he looked. By this time the player had all of the different Forces accessible and Luke was at his most powerful. Jon Knowles, my animation supervisor, did an awesome job animating Darth with the limited sprites we had available.

"In *Super Jedi* it's definitely the Rancor. It's the biggest beast in the *Star Wars* universe, and so satisfying when you take it down. The sail-barge level was also exciting. For the first time we could create and show what the sail-barge looked like on the outside and inside. In addition, we were able to go up against a slew of bounty hunters and strange creatures. And you got to play Princess Leia with her chain weapon in a bikini! Then of course there are the final levels flying the Falcon inside the Death Star. The climax of the entire trilogy racing to the core and back out in the nick of time blasting the Death Star into a million pieces. Finally, the showdown with the Emperor was a fun level to design. The difficulty was in creating the scene with the round window. It took a lot of tiles to look right. And then giving the Emperor all of his lightning effect powers…" We wonder if Kalani would be interested in a revival of the *Super Star Wars* series. "Definitely, I'd be all over that project," Kalani enthuses. "It's the game that catapulted LucasArts into the console space and it can do it again on the new platforms. I've been trying to convince LucasArts to recreate the *Super Star Wars* trilogy for tablets, handhelds or Xbox Live Arcade/PSN. If given that opportunity I'd keep the essence of the original, though reinvent and innovate the game with today's gameplay mechanics, give it a visual facelift and, of course, pack it with even more *Star Wars* goodies… I'm totally up for it, and it will be even better than the original!"

Settle a score

The superb rendition of the *Star Wars* theme music featured on the title screen of all three games in the trilogy was a feature that surprised Kalani as much as the rest of us. "We had an incredible audio technician on the team," he says. "I remember when I heard the *Star Wars* theme in the game for the first time. I literally said, 'Oh my God, how did he do this and fit it on the SNES cartridge? It sounds identical to the movie!' It was incredible to hear it in the game and I was literally blown away. Hats off to Paul Webb at Sculptured for his dedication and passion in creating the best movie music score on the SNES. I still get comments today that the Super Nintendo score is the best on any console!"



F-Zero

Considering what *F-Zero* did for the racing genre, it's galling that it's quickly turning into one of Nintendo's forgotten licences. When *F-Zero* first launched on the Super Nintendo in 1990 it felt like a revelation, offering an arcade style experience that few home computer and console racers could deliver. Sure you had great racing games on home systems like *Deathchase* and *Stunt Car Racer*, but there was a distinct difference between them and their arcade rivals. *F-Zero* wasn't perfect, but it went a long way to closing this gap.

F-Zero set a new standard for racing games thanks to its silky smooth Mode 7 visuals, instantly making many Mega Drive and Amiga racers of the time look rather tired. Add in a scintillating soundtrack that perfectly matched the turbocharged on-screen action and Nintendo's game proved to be an aesthetic delight. It delivered an exciting new sci-fi setting as well; playing out the gruelling five lap races against a futuristic backdrop, full of day-glo neons and spectacular snaking skyscrapers.

While there are only eight different courses in the game, the three difficulty leagues (Knight, Queen and King) meant that many of the tricks were revisited, often with new layouts. Add in some truly ferocious AI on the later leagues and *F-Zero* becomes an insanely challenging racer that still remains a joy to play.

Bio

Years before *Wipeout* would burst onto the scene, Nintendo's very own futuristic racing series would make its spectacular debut on the SNES. *F-Zero* looked phenomenal thanks to some Mode 7 graphical wizardry, with the game creating a real sense of speed that was practically without precedent outside the arcade. Though its modes were limited (gamers would have to wait for the series to finally get multiplayer), its tight gameplay, surprising depth and formidable difficulty made it a hit with racing fans. Now, if only we could get a next-gen *F-Zero* sequel…

Platform	SNES
Developer	Nintendo
Released	1990

A lack of multiplayer is the only thing that really lets this amazing game down

More Classic F-Zero Moments

"It's all in the reflexes"

The are four crafts available in *F-Zero*; Captain Falcon's Blue Falcon, Samurai Goroh's Fire Stingray, Dr Stewart's Golden Fox and Pico's Wild Goose, and each vehicle offers a completely different driving experience. While the Blue Falcon's balanced stats make it perfect for beginners, we actually prefer the toughness and tight handling of Wild Goose.

Recharge your batteries

F-Zero is a surprisingly challenging game on its later courses and you'll often find yourself getting punished by tight corners and losing precious energy as a result. Once your energy is completely depleted you'll burst into flames, something you want to avoid at all costs. Needless to say, the moment at the start of each stage when you get to recharge your vehicle is not one you'll soon forget.

Silence is golden

If you don't regularly make use of the L and R buttons in *F-Zero* you'll soon come a cropper. It becomes apparent when you reach Silence, the final track of the Knight League. It's a brutal course full of tight 90° turns that really separates the men from the boys. Despite its difficulty, though, it remains a superbly designed track.

The need for speed

F-Zero is all about speed, with the four pilots being able to achieve speeds of over 400 kilometers an hour. Even that's not enough for these speed freaks though, so it's handy that you're rewarded with a boost after every lap, which rushes you forward at sickening speeds of over 500kph. It's a superb feeling the first time you use it, but also offers a level of strategy later in the game.

Top 25 SNES Games

Retro Gamer readers reveal their favourite ever SNES games. Find out if yours made the final cut

SimCity

25 It may be primarily remembered as a PC franchise but, with numerous changes and additions to this console port, it's little wonder so many of you cited it as a SNES favourite. Developed by Nintendo EAD rather than Maxis, this version has a distinct Japanese flavour and several beautiful Nintendo twists – seeing Bowser stomp through the city is up there with the greatest gaming moments. The team did a great job of making it work with a controller rather than a mouse, too.

ActRaiser

24 The beauty of *ActRaiser* is that it is effectively two games in one. Half god game – albeit without any direct religious references, thanks to Nintendo's hard-line self-censorship of the time – half action game, all awesome. While it's true that neither part is a dedicated example of the genres in question, it's the unique fusion that makes this so memorable. Putting town creation and management on hold to go kick some ass is something that no other game can offer.

Cybernator

23 A surprisingly strong showing in support of this shooter sees it make the list ahead of some bona fide classics like *Super Punch-Out!*, but you've gotta love the underdog. *Cybernator* is an inventive mech shooter that really makes you feel like you're in control of a huge, complex piece of military kit and it still holds up brilliantly today. The same can't be said of the game's budget PlayStation 2 remake, sadly – our advice would be to just stick with the original…

Zombies Ate My Neighbours

22 There's a lot to be said for this B-movie shooter, so we're not overly surprised to see it here. The sad loss of LucasArts might have done something to bolster its following, but it's certainly not ill-deserved – the humour, style and tight gameplay are all enviable. Perhaps the original great co-op game, *Zombies Ate My Neighbours* lets protagonists Zeke and Julie use anything they can find to hold off the zombie apocalypse and secure the safety of the guys and gals that live down the street.

Donkey Kong Country 2: Diddy's Kong Quest

21 If you could all have just pulled together and decided amongst yourselves which *Donkey Kong Country* game was best, it could quite easily have made the top five. Instead, divided opinion gives us two *Kong* games in this list. Quite how DK came to be kidnapped in the first place is a conversation for another time, though it's clear that Diddy and Dixie can handle themselves well enough without him. It was around this point that Rare's love affair with collectibles truly began.

Super Aleste

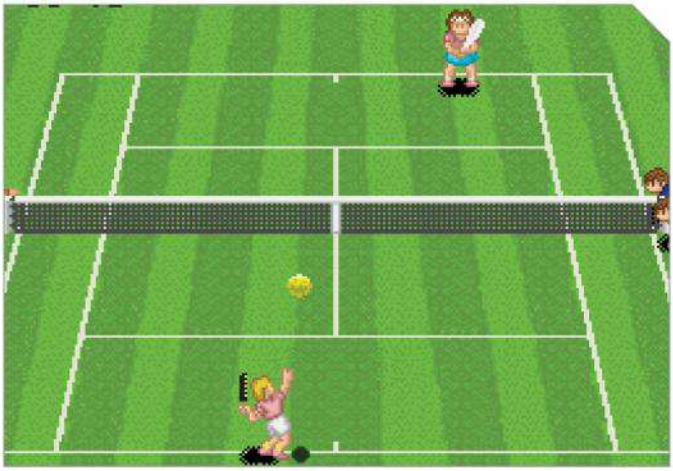
20 An excellent shooter, as evidenced by the fact that it managed to beat the likes of *Super R-Type*, *Gradius III* and *UN Squadron*. A rich and varied arsenal is what really makes *Super Aleste* stand out, each of the eight weapons offering six different levels of power. Furthermore, each can be modified at the touch of a button, adding reverse fire or changing properties to give options that can more or less cover every situation the game throws at you.

EarthBound

19 It may not have had a UK release, but that seems to have had little impact on the popularity of this glorious RPG. Perhaps offered a little more exposure thanks to Ness' appearance in *Super Smash Bros.*, this quirky title can take pride of place in any collection – mint originals can change hands for upwards of £500. Why? Until its recent appearance on the Wii U Virtual Console, *EarthBound* was one of the few retro classics not to have seen a re-release in any form.

Super Mario All-Stars

18 A compilation and console bundle title it may be, but far be it from that to exclude this collection of timeless games from your list. Sporting enhanced versions of the three NES *Mario* titles as well as super-tough variant *The Lost Levels* – famously *Super Mario Bros 2* in Japan – this is pretty much platforming heaven. Any one of the games would be worthy of a spot on this list alone, so the combination is pretty much a shoo-in. Later versions also included *Super Mario World*.



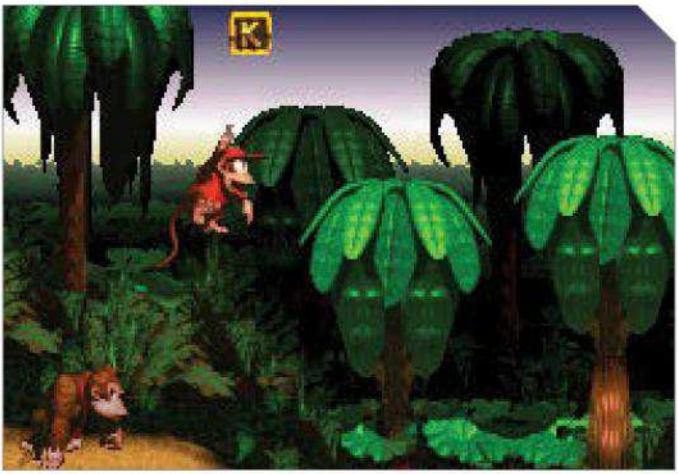
Super Tennis

17 Early titles are always going to live large in the hearts of fans – and we can assume that's why this 1991 title earned a spot on this list, although we'd struggle to point to an earlier multiplayer sports game that we got so much enjoyment out of. Making tennis feel quick and fun was a masterstroke, though even the points that dragged on proved to be hugely enjoyable – that's why we saw the same arcade template found here in games such as *Smash Court Tennis* and, later, *Virtua Tennis*.

Super Bomberman

16 Bomberman would be higher on this list if it weren't for the fact that gamers had no less than five different outings to consider. Ignoring the fact that the SNES had just two controller ports, Konami elected to use a multi-tap to allow for showdowns on a scale never before seen on console. Later games introduced even more elements and, to be frank, we'd probably rather have seen one of these make the list.

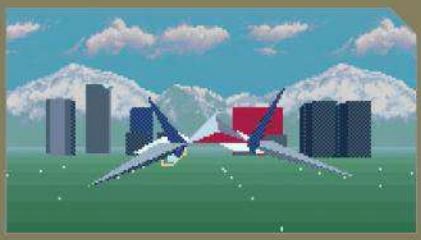
Donkey Kong Country



15 Poor old Retro. As much as it tried its best to recapture the magic of the originals, in essence it's just not the same. The music, the design and the well-judged level of difficulty for *Donkey Kong* platformers were all nailed the first time around. A stunning effort by Rare.

Chrono Trigger

14 As if this time-hopping RPG classic wasn't going to make this list. As if. Any game that stars a noble frog warrior is one that we fully support, so we'll take any excuse we can get to celebrate this wonderful action-RPG from Square's archives.



Star Fox

13 This is more than deserving of recognition for its introduction of useless gaming baggage Slippy Toad alone. It's just a shame that its pioneering 3D visuals will forever take a back seat due to the 'do a barrel roll' meme it spawned.

F-Zero

12 Racing games are boring? Yeah, nice try. A futuristic setting and amazing 3D visuals that pushed the SNES' Mode 7 to the limit made this iconic racer an unforgettable experience for everyone who played it. It's still fondly remembered, and legendary pilot Captain Falcon has since gone on to be an integral part of the *Super Smash Bros* franchise, though it's saddening that we haven't seen a new outing in the main *F-Zero* series since the absolutely exceptional *GX* on the GameCube.

Final Fantasy VI

11 Picking just one of Square's 16-bit *Final Fantasy* games is a near-impossible choice, so well done for settling on this one. Echoes of *FFVI* can be felt in every canon game since, and its Uematsu soundtrack is enough to secure it a place on this rundown alone.

Super Castlevania IV

10 Ask most people which is their favourite *Castlevania* and, more often than not, you'll hear *Symphony Of The Night*. While the PlayStation game is a spectacular display of genre-straddling RPG action, there's a hardcore arcade purity to *Super Castlevania IV* that gives it the edge. The music, the bosses, the sheer variety… this is the stuff of legend and its reverence is fully justified. Action-platforming with a gothic slant, and a formidable difficult that would make *Dark Souls* players blush.

Secret Of Mana

9 There had to be at least one Square RPG in the top ten and, with so many classics failing to get European releases, it stands to reason that *Secret of Mana* should be the one to make the cut. Three-player co-op was a unique selling point but, even without that, *Secret Of Mana* would still hold up brilliantly. This action-RPG managed to tick every box, from a unique levelling system to a great cast of characters that could be tailored to suit your own whims. Despite several sequels, this remains the best game in the series – the PlayStation entry has its fans, but their numbers are feeble compared to those who would back the original. To this day, we've yet to see a truly great *Mana* follow-up and, while it's looking unlikely that we'll see one in this play-safe environment, it'd be a retro insta-win if Square announced a new, but still old-school, *Mana* game tomorrow.

"This action-RPG managed to tick every box, from a unique levelling system to a great cast of characters that could be tailored to suit your own whims"

Contra III: The Alien Wars

8 Anyone that throws their hardcore weight around based on recent accomplishments like finishing *Dark Souls* or *Super Meat Boy* would do well to pop back in time and give this monster a go. Whatever you choose to call it, this is pretty much the epitome of hardcore – dudes come from everywhere, and all of them will kill you in a single hit. Pretty much the ultimate run-and-gun game, *Contra III* exists to kick the ass of anyone who tries to play it.

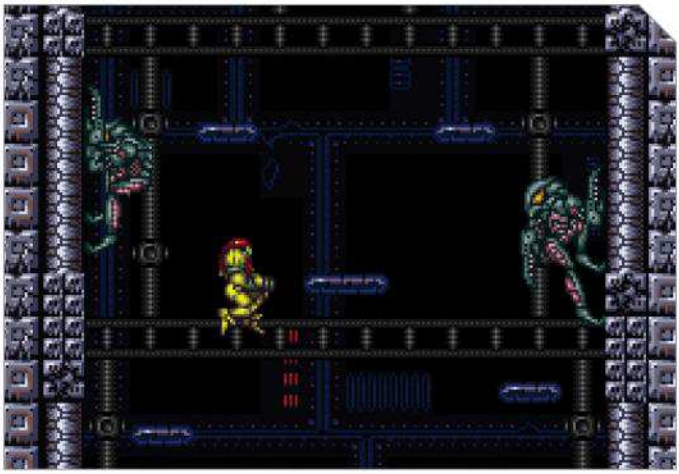
Pilotwings

7 Tech demos seem to be the order of the day lately, with the likes of *Wii Sports* capturing the imaginations of millions. But this beat all of them to the punch, a showcase for the unknown power of the SNES and an early glimpse at the magic of 3D. Few could have imagined that a flight game would be the one to show off what the SNES was truly capable of, but that's precisely what *Pilotwings* did. 3D gaming wouldn't become the norm until years later, but here we got a glimpse of the future.

Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island

6 Honestly, we thought this classic platformer would come in a little higher. But with *Super Mario World* stealing the majority of the vote, we guess it was a 'one or the other' mindset. Either way, this dino-themed sequel performed admirably and, while we wouldn't want to have to make a pitch as to which was the better game, the egg-tossing love this game has received pretty much does that for us. Platform games don't come much better than this.

Super Metroid



5 Few games have laid out their stalls quite so well as this. *Super Metroid* barely says a word, but it doesn't need to. If anything, that's the joy of it – the mystery is what keeps you playing and, even when you know what you're doing, this is not an easy world to explore. Setting the template for an entire sub-genre, *Super Metroid* can happily claim to be one of the most influential titles ever made, and to this day it's possibly the greatest work-it-out-as-you-go-along game of all time…

Super Mario Kart

4 Another obvious choice, although it'd take a real Blue Shell enthusiast (there's no such thing) to claim that *Mario Kart* was a fair way to settle disputes. Still, few would argue that this wasn't one of the great multiplayer games of our time. Multiplayer rivalries can still be settled with this tried and tested method, although many cite more recent games – *Double Dash*, *MK7* and even the *Wii* version – as the best. There's no right answer... well, okay, there is. And it's not *Mario Kart 64*.

Street Fighter II Turbo

3 If you owned a SNES and had a second controller, chances are you doubled up for the opportunity to show your mates what a Dragon Punch or a Flash Kick was. *Street Fighter* was the go-to competitive game at the time and, while we've since learned to play on stick, that wasn't really an option back in the day. Capcom did an incredible job of bringing the arcade experience home – this was this kind of perfect port that made your friends with a Mega Drive incredibly jealous.

The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past

2 Arguments will rage until the end of time as to which of Link's adventures is the best but it's this seminal title and *Ocarina Of Time* that most often find themselves on top. While the 3D debut was unquestionably a masterpiece, it likely wouldn't have existed at all had it not been for this beautiful RPG. There might have been slightly more direction than the NES original but *ALTTP* still managed to feel like you were lost in a strange world with only your wits to rely on.

Super Mario World

1 Nintendo's mascot was always going to be a clear favourite to claim the top spot on this list, but the landslide took even those of us expecting a moustachioed number one by surprise. Mario didn't just walk this list – he grabbed a Cape Feather and flew over the top of the whole damn thing. With *Super Mario World* appearing as a pack-in with many console bundles, this would have been the first experience of 16-bit gaming for many people. And what a way to start – it'd be like your first taste of meat being a huge T-bone steak, or your first car after passing your test being a Ferrari. This is seen by many as being as close as we've come to platforming perfection and, truth be told, we're in no position to argue. We still play *Super Mario World* regularly to this day and we're still discovering new tricks and secrets hidden away in the many, many stages. There's so much to talk about in celebration of *Super Mario World* that it's difficult to know where to begin. But, we'll start as is logical – with pretty much the first thing you see when starting up the game. The map structure isn't entirely new, with *Super Mario Bros 3* pulling much the same stunt albeit broken down by level. But, it's the improved sense of scale that comes from having one big map that really makes this feel like an epic journey, and one where the route – and even the destination – aren't always clear. Find a hidden exit to a stage and you can find yourself branching out into areas far more difficult than you're used to. But, with so many routes on offer, there's no shame in returning to the beaten path in order to hurry along your journey to Bowser's castle.

Then, there's the way that each of the power-ups changes how you approach and traverse each stage. A cape will let you soar up to hidden cloud platforms if you can get the speed up to get lift in the first place, while a fire flower lets you muscle your way past many obstacles. There are even a few situational pickups (such as the one that turns Mario into a balloon) to use and abuse, though it's definitely the trusty mushroom that will see the most use. You can even keep one of these back in reserve – useful if you know you'll need it later in a tricky level and don't want to risk losing it along the way.

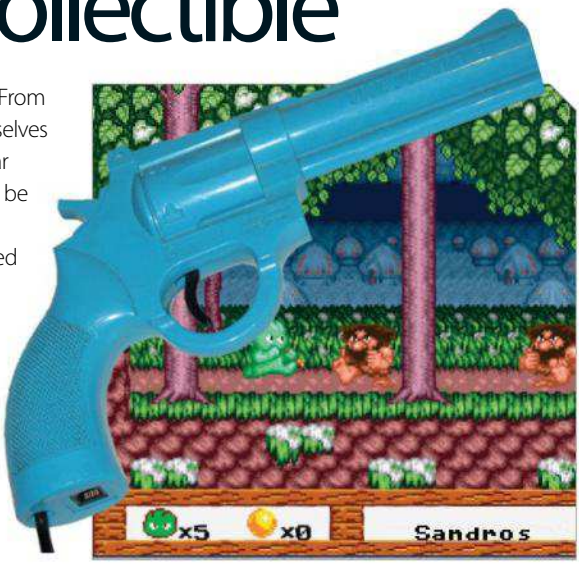
Whether or not there's such a thing as a perfect game is an argument that will never be definitively won. Whether or not *Super Mario World* is the closest thing we've seen to one, though? That's not even up for debate.

The Collector's Guide

The SNES is a great console to collect for. Follow this guide and you won't go far wrong

Manufacturer: Nintendo **Models:** Super Nintendo/Super Famicom **Launched:** 1990 **Country of Origin:** Japan

Why it's collectible



Growing up in the Nineties wasn't easy. From an early age, many gamers found themselves thrown into the epicentre of a digital war between two Japanese superpowers to be reckoned with.

Sega and Nintendo's conflict controlled the playgrounds and workplace, Sonic against Mario. The battle continues today, as the mention of the Super Nintendo versus the Sega Mega Drive has collectors raising their control pads with pride.

Despite hosting fewer games than Sega's 16-bit offering, the SNES hosts a wealth of blockbuster hits amongst its huge library of over 500 known European releases. With the likes of *Super Mario World*, *F-Zero* and *Pilotwings* available from day one, shortly followed by *Super Mario Kart*, *Mega Man X* and *The Legend of Zelda: A Link To The Past*, it is no wonder that it has continued to captivate gamers to present day. However, it wasn't just about the high quality software available. Given that the gaming world had just experienced a very hard-edged and ugly selection of consoles (such as the NES and Master System), the arrival of an alluring curved console bundled with a comfortable control pad was too good to dismiss.

It wasn't just the games that came in flimsy cardboard boxes, making anything in-tact more valuable

Where collecting is concerned, a large majority of the SNES catalogue has seen a considerable rise in value over the last few years from an influx of nostalgia-hungry gamers. But, surely these financial skirmishes taking place on auction sites are just as prominent for the Super Nintendo's 16-bit rival? Luckily, the Sega Mega Drive fans are much safer from this barrage of collectors due to one conclusive reason. Up until the Nintendo GameCube, every game branded with the

Official Nintendo Seal was released within a flimsy cardboard box. With so few mint condition boxed games available (in comparison to the near indestructible hard-cased Mega Drive games), they are highly sought after, as collectors challenge each other to replicate that brand new feeling again.

As time passed by and Mario's newest home began to build up an incredible momentum within Europe, a sporadic release schedule shortly followed and reared its ugly head. A large chunk of the rarest PAL releases originated from a single country, leaving frustrated gamers and collectors today trawling countless top-level domain variations of eBay. Of these rarities, *X Zone* (Scandinavia), *Whirlo* (Spain), *Cool World* (Spain), *Sonic Blast Man* (Spain) *Space Invaders* (Australia) and *Super Chase HQ* (Australia) tend to be the most sought after by 16-bit collectors around the world.

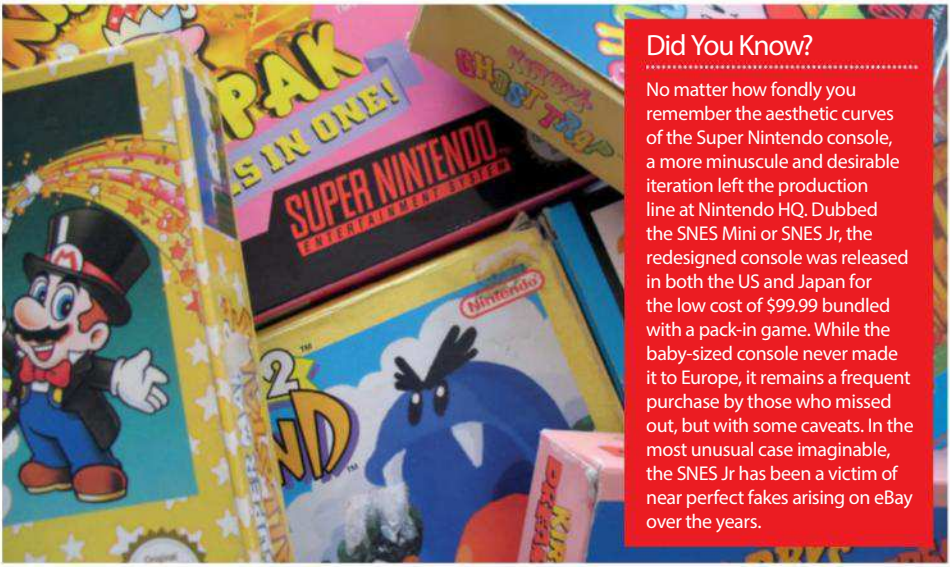
Although Nintendo had a wide range of multinational gamers, their hard work and dedication continued to ensure each Super Nintendo owner within Europe was catered for. Many releases were adjusted to better suit their target audiences – changes which often included alternate artwork, varying language options and occasionally 'classic' re-releases. Although this level of consideration sounds fantastic, those aiming to collect SNES variants face countless headaches due to the sheer volume of releases out there. *Super Mario World* is an extreme example of this, given its seventeen variants.

Complications aside, the Japanese and American release lists offered a much larger library of games, yet there was still a selection of prominent European releases which have gamers from across the pond intrigued. The most notable is the timeless Japanese RPG *Terranigma*, which for some untold reason saw a European localisation, yet nothing for gamers stateside. Auction snipers worldwide sit in wait for each and every time it surfaces, sadly driving the price

The US Super Nintendo pad dispensed with the bright colours of its PAL and Japanese counterparts

up. *Whirlo*, *The Firemen* and *Super Bomberman 3* are other good examples of this, as European gamers often struggle to hold onto their hidden treasures.

One of the more interesting aspects to note during the 16-bit era was how easy import games were to acquire. While the price tags within magazine adverts suggested that early arrivals of Japanese and American software were probably worth being patient for, there was one publication which almost justified these financial kidnappings. Simply known as Super Play, it is often referred to as the greatest gaming magazine of all time, due to its perfect combination of covering games and Japanese culture. As it focused mainly on imported titles months before their European release, a new wave of gamers were born unhappy with what their home country could offer. These disgruntled fans were often found excusing themselves as they happily paid premium prices to get their latest gaming hit way ahead of schedule. Whilst these purchases could often be expensive gambles, many of these investments have paid off, as gamers obtained classics such as *EarthBound*, *Final Fantasy III* (*VI*) and *Chrono Trigger* which never arrived in Europe. However, what they were unable to see at the time is how many of these exclusive imports



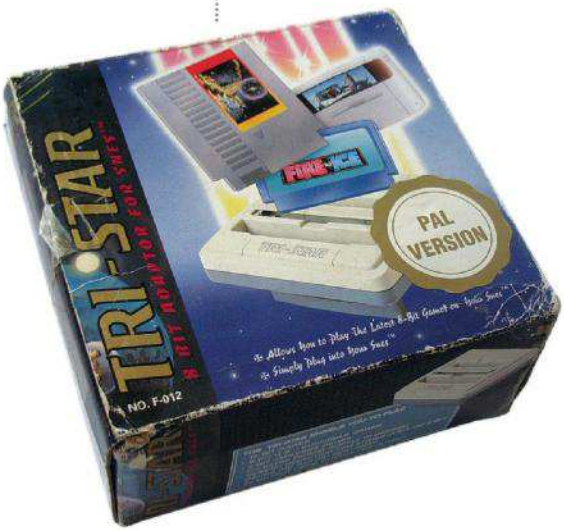
There is quite a difference between Western and Japanese box art. Which you prefer is a matter of taste

Did You Know?

No matter how fondly you remember the aesthetic curves of the Super Nintendo console, a more minuscule and desirable iteration left the production line at Nintendo HQ. Dubbed the SNES Mini or SNES Jr, the redesigned console was released in both the US and Japan for the low cost of $99.99 bundled with a pack-in game. While the baby-sized console never made it to Europe, it remains a frequent purchase by those who missed out, but with some caveats. In the most unusual case imaginable, the SNES Jr has been a victim of near perfect fakes arising on eBay over the years.

would eventually fetch three figure sums, as they do today.

With such an enticement from abroad, often limited by how far our distressed wallets could be stretched, Super Nintendo fans were left questioning how they could enjoy the wealth of cartridges without skipping meals. Quite naturally, the black market was well aware of this fact and began to envision various ways to profiteer from the 16-bit juggernaut. While very few bootlegs found their way underneath the counter of less honest shops, the pirates had another device at the ready to potentially make the expensive cartridge medium a thing of the past. Given that a large majority of early cartridges could fit onto a single floppy disk, a disk drive was placed inside a Super Nintendo compatible device known as the Super Wild Card. Capable of backing up and loading cartridges from disk, this revolutionary and attractive piece of kit made stealing games all too easy.



While there are more modern alternatives to this hardware, the Super Wild Card range and various other similar devices still get snapped up rather quickly due to their elusive nature.

Offering countless games spanning multiple regions and an array of diverse accessories, the Super Nintendo is by far one of the most desirable classic games consoles to collect. Although the deep end of collecting is quickly requiring a well padded wallet to bask in, both gamers and collectors can take pleasure in the knowledge that the majority of the Super Nintendo's classic titles can still be found relatively easily, and usually at a reasonable price.

Special edition cases were rare. If only they all came in metal tins, there would be a lot more complete packages today

"One of the more interesting aspects to note during the 16-bit era was how easy import games were to acquire"

The peripherals

Super Wild Card

With cartridges breaking the upper limits of £59.99 in the Nineties, SNES owners often found themselves limited to how many games they can afford. While this did make game rental services a profitable business, the more savvy gamers amongst us looked for other solutions. Piracy and cartridge copiers were no stranger to the games industry.

Nintendo had already embraced the illegitimate series of 'Game Doctors' for the Famicom, which ironically used the Famicom Disk System's proprietary medium of unique disks to create counterfeit software. The SNES equivalent, however, used a more accessible method, which effectively made those expensive cartridges a non-issue.

The Super Wild Card released by Front Far East was amongst the many different flavours of backup devices which began to surface. Within each unit lay a floppy disk drive capable of reading and writing to a range of 3½-inch disk formats. Once powered up, a simplistic menu appeared on screen with the option to either back-up or load a game from the disk currently inserted. Titles exceeding the capacity of a single disk, such as the massive 48 Mbit *Tales Of Phantasia*, were broken down into multiple files

"Unfortunately for Nintendo, the entire process of backing up a Super Nintendo cartridge onto a disk was all too easy"

The Super Wild Card's floppy disc port made backing-up games a doddle. But most people weren't just 'backing-up' their games…

It was game-copying made easy, and we can thank most ROM's online today to devices like this

often spanning multiple disks. Once the contents of these backups had been loaded, the chosen backup would load instantly, replicating the true cartridge experience flawlessly.

Unfortunately for Nintendo, the entire process of backing up a Super Nintendo cartridge onto a disk was all too easy. Given that all you needed to duplicate a game was a minimum of one disk and the cartridge to copy from, swashbuckling gamers made the most of Blockbuster's game rental service by spending evenings 'renting' the selection of new releases. To make matters worse for the Nintendo, the disks written by the Super Wild Card were readable by any home computer with a disk drive installed. On each disk was a single ROM file (or single file broken up over multiple disks), which could be quickly copied onto another blank disk for the next well-equipped pirate gamer.

With newer games starting to exceed the capacity of a single disk, loading often became cumbersome. On the rear side of the Super Wild Card was a solution – a parallel port. With the right software available, gamers could send ROM files via a PC through a parallel port cable, in which the cartridge copier would begin to write to memory and execute the game upon completion. This quicker method was then bettered once more with the arrival of the newer and more expensive Super Wild Card DX2, a unit which allowed its disk drive to be swapped for a CD-ROM drive.

No matter which way you looked at it, the countless features made the Super Wild Card a rather inviting, although admittedly dishonest device. That said, these devices deserve our thanks as they are the main reason why the entire Super Nintendo library has been archived for future generations to come, in what we more commonly know as ROMs.

…and the rest

01 Super Scope

In an attempt to out-do one another in the light gun department, both Sega and Nintendo believed that 'bigger was better'. Light guns soon became light bazookas, and adding to the absurdity, the Super Scope was fitted with a shoulder rest and scope – making gamers feel rather awkward while sat in front of the television with a gigantic plastic rocket launcher.

02 Blaze Import Adapter

With Europe caught up in an import frenzy, meticulous gamers needed to make sure that their rig was equipped for the multitude of treats flowing in from abroad. As US games were too wide for the PAL slot, import adapters extended the SNES cartridge slot upwards, allowing for all shapes and sizes to be attached.

03 Hudson Soft's Super Multitap

Realising the limitations that hampered their earlier *Bomberman* outing on the NES, Hudson Soft went ahead and bundled a four player adapter with its 16-bit release of *Super Bomberman*. Allowing up to four separate players to connect into one controller port, the adaptor was revolutionary, and players soon began to blast their way through a collection of tangled control pads and increasingly angry competitors.

04 Super Advantage/ Score Master

In a time when the arcades still offered unmatchable graphics and gameplay, the nearest you could get to the coin-op experience at home was with a stick. Following on from the NES Advantage arcade stick, Nintendo released a SNES model known as the Super Advantage.

05 Super Everdrive and SNES PowerPak

The modern alternative to the Super Wild Card, the newly introduced memory card-compatible cartridges allowed gamers to access the entire library of SNES games without emulation. Eliminating the need to invest for rarer titles, these state-of-the-art devices come as the ultimate accessory for the SNES.

06 Super Nintendo Mouse

Arriving bundled with the novelty graphic software package, Mario Paint, the compatibility of the SNES Mouse was often overlooked. Capable of working with over 50 games, the SNES Mouse offered gamers much more precision for the likes of *SimCity* and *Lemmings 2: The Tribes*.

07 Super Game Boy

In 1994 a device capable of playing Game Boy games on a Television was introduced to the SNES. Not only did this device allow full-screen action on games intended for a small LCD display, but it also enhanced the visuals with a range of colours and decorative borders.

Top games to play

Play these next

Super Metroid

Eight years after Samus' first appearance, the third game in the *Metroid* series arrived on the SNES in 1994. It offered a doomed space colony to explore and the potential to get lost deep within Planet Zebes. The UK and German releases of *Super Metroid* also came in an oversized box bundled with a 72-page strategy guide.

Pilotwings

Falling into the lackluster flight simulation genre, *Pilotwings* was an unexpected hit arriving on launch day for the Super Nintendo. Taking control of some stunt-hungry aviators, your job is to carefully guide a selection of aircraft through hoops and loops. Easier said than done, *Pilotwings* is one of the hardest games to master.

"Mario's next appearance on the Super Nintendo strengthened the very roots of the platform genre"

Super Mario Kart

Was there ever any doubt that this manic multiplayer racer would make the list? The near-perfect kart racer still remains the pinnacle of the series to this day, and has spawned an abundance of clones.

The Legend of Zelda: A Link To The Past

Having returned after a four-year hiatus, Link was back in his only outing on the Super Nintendo, proving there was still a plethora of life in the Hyrule legacy.

Starwing/Star Fox
Utilising the powerful Super FX chip *Star Fox* was arguably one of the most groundbreaking releases during the Super Nintendo's lifespan, proving 3D was easily done in 16-bit.

Super Mario World
Following on from the success of the NES hit release, Mario's next appearance on the Super Nintendo strengthened the very roots of the platform genre.

Donkey Kong Country
While offering a perfect blend of challenges and frustration, *Donkey Kong Country* should be in every collection purely for its sensational soundtrack and attention to detail.

Play these next

Mega Man X
Like every other popular franchise on the NES, *Mega Man* was reborn on the Super Nintendo with a multitude of new abilities. Having outgrown his clunky robotic suit, the blue bomber was now able to dash and kick-jump walls. These tricks might have helped, but it was still an insanely difficult action-platformer.

Super Castlevania IV
With Dracula's revival dawning on Simon Belmont, the fourth edition in the hit series *Castlevania* arrived on the Super Nintendo just months after the console's release. Offering a range of graphical trickery, elaborate challenges and a groundbreaking soundtrack, *Super Castlevania IV* confidently built upon the iconic Castlevania name.

F-Zero
If there was ever a game to demonstrate the potential power and capability of a new system, *F-Zero* was it. Using the newly included feature of Mode 7 graphics on the Super Nintendo, the ultra-fast futuristic racer took faux-3D gaming to an all new level, both graphically and where gameplay is concerned.

Top import games

Import these next

Chrono Trigger

Squaresoft unquestionably defined the JRPG genre in the Nineties with their vast selection of epic adventures. *Chrono Trigger* was no different, presenting itself as one of the best releases of the decade. If the storyline wasn't enough to convince you, the visuals of *Dragon Quest* and *Dragon Ball Z* artist Akira Toriyama would.

Magical Pop'n

In what appears to be a light-hearted side-scrolling adventure, *Magical Pop'n* lures gamers in with its cute visuals shortly before unleashing an unforgettable challenge. After rising to cult hidden-gem status, this Japanese exclusive release developed by Polestar has seen endless competition for ownership on eBay.

"The effort from Squaresoft and Nintendo failed to arrive, much to many PAL gamers' disappointment"

Tales Of Phantasia

While this 48 Mbit tale never ventured outside of Japan (before its Game Boy Advance port), fanatical SNES gamers compiled an accessible English translation patch for the Japanese ROM.

Final Fantasy III/VI

Often battling with *Chrono Trigger* for the title of 'Best SNES RPG', *Final Fantasy VI* (*III* in the US) pushed the genre's limits further than ever with its engrossing 60-plus hour expedition.

Earthbound

As RPGs continued to stick to their traditional roots, *EarthBound* broke the mould by creating a humorous, engaging adventure to which just about anybody could relate. Boing!

Super Mario RPG

While Europe was lucky enough to get the majority of Mario's adventures, the unusual combined effort from Squaresoft and Nintendo failed to arrive, much to many PAL gamers disappointment.

Battle Cross

While *Super Mario Kart* was dominating sales charts worldwide, this frantic Japanese exclusive was another worthy opponent for the title of 'Best Super Nintendo Multiplayer Racer'.

Import these next

The King of Demons (Majyuuou)

Often referred to as '*Castlevania* with a gun', *The King of Demons* (Majyuuou) is yet another addition to the list of hidden gems on the SNES. Featuring detailed landscapes and character sprites, the 1995 action game by KSS leaves many gamers wondering why it missed out on an a PAL release.

DoReMi Fantasy: Milon's DokiDoki Adventure

The top contender for the most sickeningly cute visuals is surely this, Hudson Soft's platformer is the perfect remedy for those gloomy days. Having never left Japan, the highly desirable and enjoyable *DoReMi Fantasy* has seen an incredible rise in value over the last few years.

Ogre Battle: March of the Black Queen

Although many will argue *Final Fantasy Tactics* defined the turn-based tactical RPG, *Ogre Battle* has many gameplay hooks which Squaresoft's later release owes inspiration to. While commanding high price-tags today, Atlus recently re-released the game on the PSP.

Top rarest PAL games

Get these next

Daze Before Christmas

Rumoured to have only been sold during Christmas of 1994, this seasonal platformer unsurprisingly remains to be one of the tougher Super Nintendo titles to locate. Given its limited holiday shelf-life and lack of re-playability, this festive release sold in very low numbers similar to the Mega Drive game of the same name.

Operation Logic Bomb

Arriving as a sequel to the Game Boy top-down shooter *Fortified Zone*, the German release of *Operation Logic Bomb* was a shallow game offering nothing but pretty visuals. Like many Jaleco releases for the SNES, *Operation Logic Bomb* comes with a rather impressive rarity as collectors attempt to locate the failed shooter.

"This rare Nordic exclusive was one of the few releases to make use of the under-loved, under-used Super Scope"

X Zone

Hailing from Scandinavia, this incredibly rare Nordic exclusive was one of the few releases to make use of the under-loved and under-used Super Scope light gun (or should that be light bazooka?).

Whirlo

Continuing to prove Spain has plenty to offer the rarity hunters, this hard-to-find Namco platformer offers much more than rarity alone, as it's an adorable and addictive adventure.

Cool World

Arriving on the Super Nintendo as a tie-in for the (highly forgettable) movie of the same name, the Spanish exclusive of *Cool World* flopped even harder than the disappointing feature film.

Brawl Brothers

By the time Jaleco released this sequel to *Rival Turf*, gamers had grown tired of side-scrolling beat-'em-ups, leaving *Brawl Brothers* to be fought over in years to come.

Aero The Acrobat 2

Despite being a rather enjoyable follow-up to Aero's last outing, *Aero The Acrobat 2* exists in numbers arguably smaller than the financial figures it commands. A rarity worth having, if only for future price.

Get these next

Space Invaders

Despite being a runaway hit in countless 1978 arcades, the PAL Super Nintendo-port of *Space Invaders* was only released in limited quantities throughout Australia. While the game remains a timeless classic, Taito did very little with the arcade port to make it stand out against the wide range of engaging SNES games.

Super Chase HQ

Adding the prefix of 'Super' to the name of an older game wasn't always a promise of enhanced gameplay and visuals. Taito took their much-loved arcade hit *Chase HQ* and sculpted an unplayable mess featuring a new in-car view. With such poor review scores, *Super Chase HQ* remained on the shelves, becoming a future rarity.

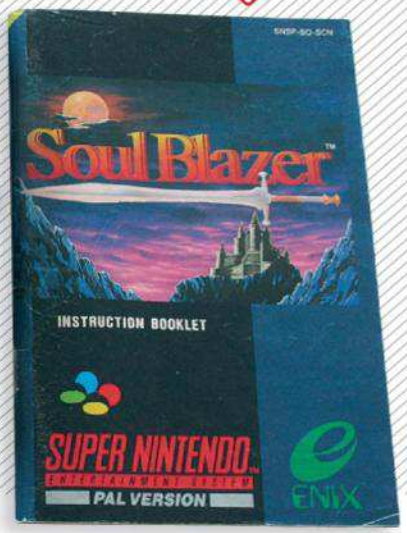
Hungry Dinosaurs

There's always a handful of games on any console that just don't click with gamers, *Hungry Dinosaurs* being one of them. Arriving as a two-player hybrid of *Othello* and *Snake*, this incredibly dull stone age-themed release sold poorly following a very negative reception from both gaming publications and gamers themselves.

The jewel in the crown

It's commonly thought that no English language version of *Soul Blazer* exists. But is that true? If you turn to an unlikely place, you might just be surprised…

The Nordic edition of *Soul Blazer* is a stunning addition to any collection… if you can track it down



What makes it so special?

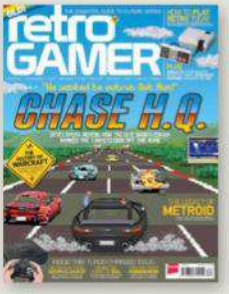
The most common versions of *Soul Blazer* hail from Europe and are in French or German, rendering it unplayable for the rest of the continent (unless you speak the languages). Unknown to those who continue to import Enix's hit from abroad, however, an English language version of *Soul Blazer* has been available all these years, hidden deep within Scandinavia.

Why is it so expensive?

While the English language version is highly desirable, there's often another reason for the fluster of bids. The common European versions featured much plainer alternate artwork, surrounded by unattractive black borders. The harder to find game, on the other hand, comes with a far more attractive cover contained within stylish navy blue borders.

What makes it hard to find?

Acquiring the Scandinavian exclusive is no easy feat. Given the nearest to a Nordic eBay is Trader. The possibility of locating it, combined with finding a seller willing to accept offers from abroad, makes obtaining *Soul Blazer* a challenge. Those unwilling to embrace the struggle will simply have to bide their wait for one to surface on eBay, however long it takes.



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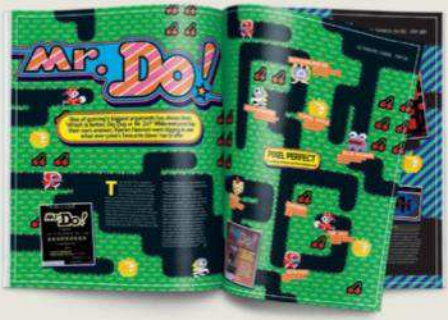

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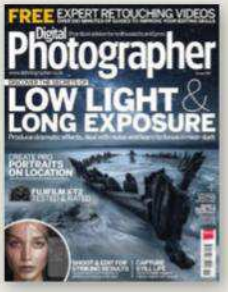

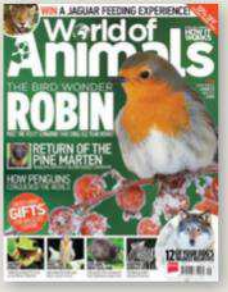

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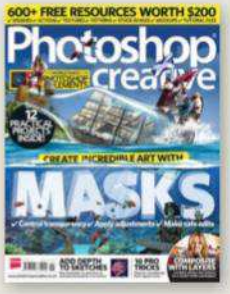

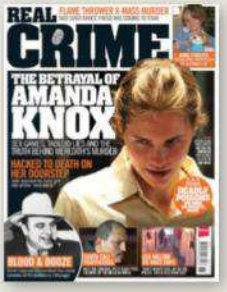

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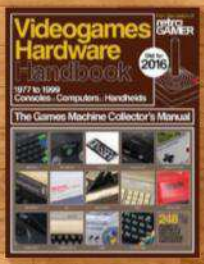

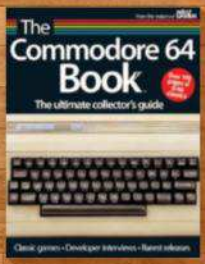

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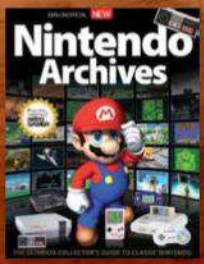
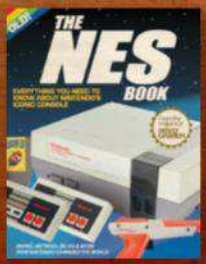
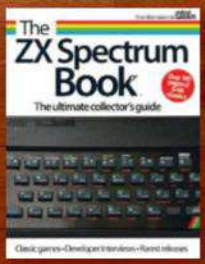
Since its origins in the 1940s, Sega has been one of the most influential players in gaming history. Relive Sega's colourful history, from coin-op capers to the Mega-CD.







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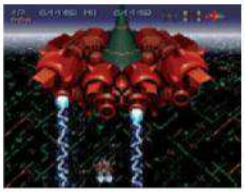

SNES

The Complete Manual

- ✔ **Collector's guide**
  Review the essential hardware and software that should be a part of any SNES collection
- ✔ **Greatest games**
  Count down the best games to ever grace the SNES. Did your favourite make the list?
- ✔ **Iconic characters**
  Revisit the games that turned Mario, Link and Samus into bona fide gaming icons
- ✔ **Developer interviews**
  Discover the inside stories behind your favourite games with in-depth developer interviews
- ✔ **Memorable moments**
  Get ready for a nostalgia trip and relive classic gaming moments that have stood the test of time
- ✔ **Legendary RPGs**
  From *Chrono Trigger* to *EarthBound*, dive into the SNES' stunning library from the golden age of RPGs
- ✔ **Mode 7 heaven**
  We pay tribute to the revolutionary graphics mode behind games like *F-Zero* and *Pilotwings*
- ✔ **Classic hardware**
  Take a look inside the console, controllers and accessories that defined the 16-bit era
- ✔ **Rarest titles**
  Find out which hard-to-find games should be top of the list for serious SNES collectors
- ✔ **Retro revivals**
  See your favourite SNES games showcased, with expert commentary on why they've become classics